

The Contributions of Community Learning Centres to Personal and Community Development

A Case Study of Three Centres in Padaung, Myanmar

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Abstract

The Community Learning Centre (CLC) project was first started within the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Program of Education for All framework that aimed to develop an integrated approach to providing educational opportunities for all. Such learning centres are organized and managed by local people themselves, assuming the role to provide non-formal education through alternative learning programmes within the lifelong learning approach. Since then, CLCs have received attention and support from governments in several countries in the Asia-Pacific region. This study aims to understand the operation and contributions of CLCs to the improvement of the communities in Myanmar where officially there are more than three thousand CLCs, one of the highest numbers among Southeast Asian countries.

The findings in this study were the result of a nearly six-week fieldwork in Myanmar for data collection which included visits to selected centres; informal conversations with key informants; focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with villagers; and interviews with a government official and NGO representatives. In this study, the establishment and contributions of CLCs are examined through the social capital lens. Accordingly, the operation of CLCs is seen as a process of accumulating and sharing resources for shared purposes, in this case, personal and community development. Three factors are found conducive to the operation of CLCs: effective local leadership and community-based organization that encourage local ownership; the crucial role of the facilitators; and strong community interest and support. CLCs are found to contribute to individuals' betterment, and to develop communal attitudes and communities' social capital that facilitate cooperative actions.

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List of Abbreviations

ACCU	Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO
APPEAL	Asia-Pacific Program of Education for All
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CESR	Comprehensive Education Sector Review
CLC	Community Learning Centre
DAE	Department of Alternative Education
Danida	Danish International Development Agency
DFID	Department for International Development of the United Kingdom
DMERB	Department of Myanmar Education Research Bureau
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
EXCEL	Community-based Extended and Continuous Education and Learning for Out-of-school Children
FESR	Framework for Economic and Social Reform
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOM	Government of Myanmar
INGO	International Non-governmental Organization
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MEC	Myanmar Education Consortium
MIMU	Myanmar Information Management Unit
MLRC	Myanmar Literacy Resource Centre
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOI	Ministry of Information
MOIP	Ministry of Immigration and Population
NESP	National Education Strategic Plan
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NFPE	Non-Formal Primary Education Project
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NILE	National Institute for Lifelong Education (Republic of Korea)
NLD	National League for Democracy
NSD	Norwegian Centre for Research Data
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
SVA	Shanti Volunteer Association
TEO	Township Education Officer
TSM	Township Monitor
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UIL	UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics

UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USD	United States Dollar

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1 Introduction

The Non-Formal Education (NFE) debate started to emerge in the late 1960s when there was a shift in the development discourse from promoting modernisation and economic growth through human resource development to stressing human needs, integrated rural development, and social welfare (Rogers, 2005). NFE was arguably promoted by Western agencies in response to the increasing demand for education that the inefficient formal education system in developing countries failed to address (Rogers, 2005).

The debate on NFE continued until the second half of the 1980s when it started to decline rapidly (Rogers, 2005). The years following the Jomtien International Conference on Education for All in 1990 witnessed a decreasing support for NFE as attention was drawn to formal education; effort invested in NFE was compared to “flogging a dead horse” (Hoppers, 2006, p. 13). In the 2000s, under the pressure to provide education for all and the promotion of lifelong learning, NFE has re-emerged and gained recognition for its flexibility to serve the needs of diverse groups of a population, especially vulnerable youth and the marginalized (Rogers, 2005; Hoppers, 2006; Yasunaga, 2014). For countries with a large number of out-of-school children, NFE is considered to be an important remedial solution to ensure that children are not completely excluded from education (UIS & UNICEF, 2015). However, the quality and effectiveness of NFE programmes are often limited due to the lack of funding (Hoppers, 2008; Yasunaga, 2014).

Even though NFE has long appeared in the academic discourse, there is neither a universal definition of NFE (Rogers, 2005; Yasunaga, 2014) nor a sharp distinction between formal and non-formal education (Hoppers, 2006). The International Standard Classification of Education defines NFE as

an addition, alternative and/or complement to formal education within the process of lifelong learning of individuals. It is often provided in order to guarantee the right of access to education for all.... Non-formal education mostly leads to qualifications that are not recognised as formal or equivalent to formal qualifications by the relevant national or sub-national education authorities or to no qualifications at all (UIS, 2011, p. 12).

The relationships between NFE and formal education, even though not easily distinguished, can be one of three kinds: *complementary* (NFE aims to provide *more or less the same initial*

education for those who failed to obtain it earlier in the formal system); *supplementary* (NFE aims to provide *additional education* which is not provided in the formal system); and *alternative* (NFE aims to provide a *different kind of education* with different curriculum and outcomes) (Rogers, 2005, p. 155).

Due to the flexibility in goal and implementation, a NFE programme can sometimes be seen as an educational programme but also as a development initiative (Rogers, 2005). The study seeks to understand NFE as a development programme from the grassroots level through Community Learning Centres (CLCs), because they are the “learning hub” (UIL, 2014) where various literacy, cultural and income generating activities are organized by and for the communities (UNESCO, 2002, 2008). Moreover, CLCs are considered to play a central role in bridging formal and non-formal education, catering to those at the fringes of the society while flexibly adjusting to specific needs and the local context (UNESCO, 2015).

This chapter introduces the concept of CLC and provides an overview of the CLC programme in the Asia-Pacific region. The chapter then provides the rationale for studying CLCs in Myanmar, followed by the research questions, aim and significance of the study.

1.1 An Overview of Community Learning Centres

The conception of CLC has been placed in the lifelong learning discourse (Ahmed, 2014; NILE & UIL, 2016):

Lifelong learning “from cradle to grave” is a philosophy, a conceptual framework and an organising principle of all forms of education, based on inclusive, emancipatory, humanistic and democratic values; it is all-encompassing and integral to the vision of a knowledge-based society (UIL, 2010, pp. 5-6).

According to the Bélem Framework for Action¹—which is said to be UNESCO’s first direct commitment to CLCs in an international setting (NILE & UIL, 2016)—to achieve inclusion,

¹ The Bélem Framework for Action is the outcome document of the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI), one in a series of UNESCO International Conferences on Adult Education that has been held every ten or twelve years since 1949 to “improve and enlarge education and learning opportunities for adults, and to develop adult education as a profession” (NILE & UIL, 2016, p. 6).

participation, and equity in ensuring learning opportunities for all individuals, one of the commitments is:

Creating multi-purpose community learning spaces and centres and improving access to, and participation in, the full range of adult learning and education programmes for women, taking account of the particular demands of the gender specific life-course (UIL, 2010, p. 8).

Accordingly, CLCs are established as community-driven institutions in order to increase access to knowledge and educational opportunities, especially for adults to improve the quality of life and contribute to community development (NILE & UIL, 2016). In the context of the global agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), CLCs have been increasingly emphasized as a contributor to the realization of SDG number four that aims to “ensure inclusive equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”². CLCs have a great potential to provide educational opportunities outside of the formal education system, especially for the poor and marginalized communities (UNESCO, 2016).

However, CLC is not a new concept. In the Asia-Pacific region, the inception of such learning centres can be traced back to the second half of the 1980s when there was a growing emphasis on humanistic, rather than purely economic, approaches to development:

Development *of* the people means investing more in human capabilities, whether in education, health or promotion of technical skills. Development *for* the people means ensuring that economic benefits generated are distributed widely and fairly so as to improve the quality of life of everybody. Development *by* the people has the objective of allowing everyone to participate actively in the process of development (Sakya & Meyer, 1997, p. 3).

Moreover, there was an underlying rationale that the piecemeal approach to provision and expansion of education for all had not succeeded; instead, a more integrated approach was needed. In 1985, UNESCO initiated the Asia-Pacific Program of Education for All (APPEAL) programme which involved all Member States of Asia and the Pacific in working towards achieving 1) universal primary education, 2) eradication of illiteracy, and 3) provision of continuing education. One of its first tasks was to help strengthen the existing non-formal education systems in member countries and transform them into continuing education agencies

² For a full list of the 17 SDGs, see: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

(Sakya & Meyer, 1997). It was not until 1998 that the CLC project was launched within the APPEAL framework that defined CLCs as:

Local and educational institutions outside the formal education system for villages or urban areas, usually set up and managed by local people to provide various learning opportunities for community development and improvement of people's quality of life (Sakya & Meyer, 1997, p. 121).

This definition has been adopted by member countries when referring to CLCs. In principle, these learning centres are organized and managed by local people themselves, assuming the role in providing NFE through alternative learning programmes within the lifelong learning approach (UNESCO, 2011, 2013). Some examples of the CLC activities are education, training, and skills development; community information and resource services; community development activities, and coordination and networking (UNESCO, 2013). Generally speaking, CLCs have several purposes, namely 1) to provide NFE programmes with diverse learning opportunities including literacy, educational, cultural and life skills activities; 2) to operate on a grassroots-based principle that requires strong community ownership; 3) to be one of the main delivery channels of NFE; 4) to target underserved communities in rural, mountainous or isolated areas; and 5) to ensure low cost of participation (UNESCO, 2002, 2008, 2011; UIL, 2014).

In reality, CLC operation has varied significantly from country to country in terms of, for example, management (supported by local communities, governments, NGOs or private companies) and curriculum used for literacy classes (centralized or flexibly adjusted to local needs) (UNESCO, 2008, 2011, 2013). Financially, CLCs are often unsustainable; their existence depends largely on government support and local donation (UNESCO, 2011). In terms of contributions, CLCs have been reported to help reintegrate youth into the formal education system; provide vocational skills and agricultural techniques; improve interpersonal skills as well as awareness about social issues (UNESCO, 2008, 2011; UIL, 2014). As of 2012, CLCs programmes were found in 24 countries across the Asia-Pacific region³ (UNESCO, 2013).

³ The most updated number has increased to 25, see: http://www.unescobkk.org/education/literacy-and-lifelong-learning/community-learning-centres-clcs/country-cases/?utm_campaign=cdcc4a7343-Newsletter_5_30_125_30_2012&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Master%20Newsletter%20List (last accessed on 11 May 2017).

1.2 Rationale for Studying CLCs in Myanmar⁴

“Burma/Myanmar is, after North Korea, probably the most obscure and obscured state in the contemporary world” (Steinberg, 2010, p. 1). The opening statement in David Steinberg’s book *“Burma/Myanmar: What everyone needs to know”* probably scares some people away while it sparks the curiosity of others about this country. The book was published before major events took place including the 2010 election—the first election after 20 years under the military regime—and the landslide victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD) in both the 2012 by-election and the 2015 election which signified a transition of power and led to the instalment of a new government striving for a more democratic society.

The Framework for Economic and Social Reform (FESR), adopted in 2012, has led to reforms in several sectors, including education, aiming to improve the country situation (Lall, 2016). In the NFE sub-sector, which includes the CLC programme as a component, a NFE policy framework was developed following the new National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) (2016-2021) published in March 2016. Much remains to be done in the education reform process, especially because the reform agenda has been a contested area in discussions between the government and international organizations present in the country (Lall, 2016).

There is a surprising contrast between the overall investment in education and the number of CLCs in Myanmar. In the financial year 2012-2013, as a percentage of the GDP, government spending on education in Myanmar was 1.46%, the lowest among ASEAN⁵ countries (UNICEF, 2013). However, the number of government-led CLCs in Myanmar was one of the highest in the region, only exceeded by Vietnam, Indonesia, and Thailand (Table 1.1).

In a country where the education budget was low and formal education was described as deteriorating due to underinvestment during the authoritarian military regime (Lall, 2008), how did the government manage to support more than 3,000 CLCs? If they are run by the communities—which is intriguing since this abides by the true spirit of the CLCs “For them,

⁴ The terms Myanmar and Burma have both been used to refer to the same country. The former was adopted by the military government in 1988 and has since been accepted by the United Nations. The latter was mostly used by the political opposition (Steinberg, 2010). Without any political intention, this thesis uses Myanmar to refer to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar except when “Burma” is a direct quote.

⁵ ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations. There are ten countries in ASEAN (see, <http://asean.org/asean/asean-member-states/>).

By them, With them” — it would be worthwhile to find out how the communities are able to do it. Or is there a different mechanism operating in these CLCs in Myanmar?

Table 1.1 Number of CLCs in Seven ASEAN Countries⁶ by Year and Provider

Country	Year	CLC		Total
		Government	NGO/others	
Cambodia	2012	302	19	321
Indonesia	2012	350	6,486	6,836
Lao PDR	2013	23	275	298
Myanmar	2013	3,040	-	3,040
Philippines	2013	522	50	572
Thailand	2013	8,764	-	8,764
Vietnam	2013	10,826	-	10,826

Note: Statistics were collected from country reports on CLCs in various years and synthesized by the author⁷.

In a study on CLCs more than a decade ago, Middelborg (2002) wrote:

Many communities in Myanmar are poor and isolated, and they often do not know what changes to make to improve their life or how to do so. Hence, they often continue to go on with the traditional ways they know (p. 31).

It is not clear whether this observation still holds true in Myanmar that has undergone several political changes. However, considering that more than two thirds of the population is still living in the rural areas and might be affected by the ongoing reforms, a study of CLCs and their contributions to the community is believed to be relevant.

1.3 Aim of the Study

Several questions motivated the undertaking of this study. As reasoned above, given a high number of CLCs in Myanmar, it was assumed that there must be an effective management strategy for these CLCs and their existence must have been well received by the local communities. Originally, the overall aim was to understand 1) the operational structure of CLCs in Myanmar, 2) factors contributing to their sustenance, and 3) their contributions to the

⁶ Reports from only seven (out of ten) countries in ASEAN are available; Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore are missing.

⁷ The reports were retrieved from: http://www.unescobkk.org/education/literacy-and-lifelong-learning/community-learning-centres-clcs/country-cases/?utm_medium=twitter&utm_source=dlvr.it

communities. Based on the statistics from the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR), Mon State with the highest number of CLCs in Myanmar (MOE, 2014) was initially identified as the research site.

In reality, this was not the case. I was informed by all contact persons in Myanmar upon my arrival that most of the CLCs had stopped functioning or functioned only as libraries, and there were no functional CLCs in Mon State. In the end, I managed to gain access to three functional CLCs in Padaung through contact with an education official. This suggests that there is disparity between what is written on paper and what is happening in reality. Nevertheless, the overall aim of the study remained the same, that is, in view of the fact that there are so few existing CLCs, how do local people manage to maintain their operation and what are their contributions to the communities?

1.4 Research Questions

In line with the overall aim, the study has three research questions:

- 1a. How do Padaung CLCs operate and what are the roles of stakeholders in that process?
- 1b. What factors are conducive to the operation of Padaung CLCs?
2. How do CLC participants perceive the contributions of CLCs to the betterment of themselves and their communities?

1.5 Significance of the Study

A study of CLCs and their contributions to the communities is not new. Several studies have examined the benefits of CLCs through a social empowerment or rural transformation perspective, often linked to the lifelong learning approach (Zhang; 2011; Chang & Yoo, 2012; Vollmann, 2014; Ahmed, 2014; Sharma, 2015). In a more recent project, the National Institute for Lifelong Education (NILE) (South Korea) and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) investigated the wider benefits of CLCs at both individual and societal levels (NILE & UIL, 2016).

This study complements the existing studies by examining the contributions of CLCs through the social capital lens: how the establishment of CLCs and its activities contribute to the social capital of the community. Social capital is understood as various types of assets embedded in social relationships that can facilitate mutually collective beneficial action; the establishment of CLCs is considered to facilitate the process of sharing resources and accumulating social capital.

This study also contributes by studying CLCs in Myanmar specifically. As the leading institution in advocating and following up on CLC activities in the Southeast Asian region, the UNESCO Bangkok regional office has published several reports and organized a series of regional workshops on CLCs⁸. However, there is limited focus and information on Myanmar in these reports – a gap which this study seeks to fill.

1.6 Outline

The thesis has eight chapters which are structured as follows: following this introduction chapter, Chapter 2 provides an overall background of Myanmar by tracing its history since the pre-colonial period (the late 1800s) until 2010. It also introduces the current education system, relevant documents on the ongoing education reform process, and the CLC programme in Myanmar.

Chapter 3 elaborates on the analytical framework and its relevance to understanding CLCs. The analytical framework is constructed using relevant concepts of social capital theories, primarily from Nan Lin's (2002) and Uphoff's (2000) discussions of social capital. Chapter 4 discusses the research methodology which includes the theoretical position, case study design, how data was collected and analyzed as well as ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

The main findings of the study are presented in Chapter 5, 6 and 7. Chapter 5 provides a descriptive account of the operation of CLCs in Padaung, the roles of stakeholders, and challenges to CLC operation. Chapter 6 explains the types of connections within the CLC operation and discusses factors that were found conducive to their operation. The contributions of CLCs to the betterment of the communities are presented in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 concludes

⁸ The last regional workshop was organized in 2013. Full information on CLC activities in the region can be found at <http://www.unescobkk.org/ru/education/literacy-and-lifelong-learning/community-learning-centres-clcs/>

the thesis with a review of the operation and contributions of the Padaung CLCs, and a discussion of the potential of CLCs in the Myanmar context.

2 Understanding Myanmar: Historical Development, Education System and Education Reforms

Myanmar is the largest country in the mainland of Southeast Asia with an area of approximately 677,000 km². It consists of seven States, seven Regions, and one Union Territory (Nay Pyi Taw Council Area) (MOIP, 2015). The seven States are Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan; the seven Regions are Sagaing, Tanintharyi, Bago, Magway, Mandalay, Yangon, and Ayeyarwaddy (Figure 2.1). Regions are mostly inhabited by the Bamar—the largest national race⁹ which makes up more than two thirds of the population—while States are mostly inhabited by other national races. There are 130 national races in Myanmar (MOE, 2014). According to the 2014 Population Census, Myanmar has a population of approximately 51.5 million; the majority (70%) lives in the rural areas.

The literacy rate of the population aged 15 and above is 89.5%; the literacy rate for males is 92.6%, higher than for females, 86.9% (MOIP, 2015). In 2010, the poverty head count index in Myanmar was 26% and poverty was overwhelmingly found in the rural areas (85%) (MOE, 2012). Myanmar's Human Development Index of 0.56 leaves Myanmar as number 145 out of 188 countries and the lowest ranked among ASEAN countries (UNDP, 2016). The indicators for the eight Millennium Development Goals also suggest that Myanmar is lagging behind the other ASEAN countries (GOM, 2013).

Myanmar is a devout Buddhist nation¹⁰. The majority of the population, approximately 89%, is Buddhist. In Myanmar, it seems that citizenship is equated to religion: “in order to be from Myanmar one must also be Buddhist” (Lall, 2016, p. 200). Spiro's (1982) extensive ethnographic study of Buddhism in Myanmar leads him to the conclusion that “There is probably no other clergy in the world which receives as much honor and respect as are offered to the Buddhist monks of Burma” (p. 396). This is for two primary reasons. First, Burmese people give great respect to the Buddhist monks because of the spiritual charisma that the monks possess. In other words, the monks are perceived to have rare qualities that enable them

⁹ National race can be understood as ethnic group. The former is used in government documents.

¹⁰ Buddhism in Myanmar is the *Theravada* (Pali Southern School) Buddhism (as opposed to the *Mahayana* (Northern School) Buddhism that is popular in China, Japan and Korea) (Houtman, 1990).

to follow all Buddhist precepts which laymen can hardly achieve. Second, by showing respect to the monks—e.g., giving food, donation for monastic edifices—one expects to gain merits. The more merits one can accumulate throughout his or her life, the better his or her rebirth will be. According to Spiro “[A monk’s] mere existence provides the laymen with what Buddhism terms ‘a field of merit’, and this is for the laymen by far the most important attribute of the Order” (p. 410). He goes on: “Because the monk is a field of merit, no Burmese village can exist without a monastery. A village can do without electricity and traction, without radios and dispensary—and most villages do—but it cannot do without a monk” (p. 410).

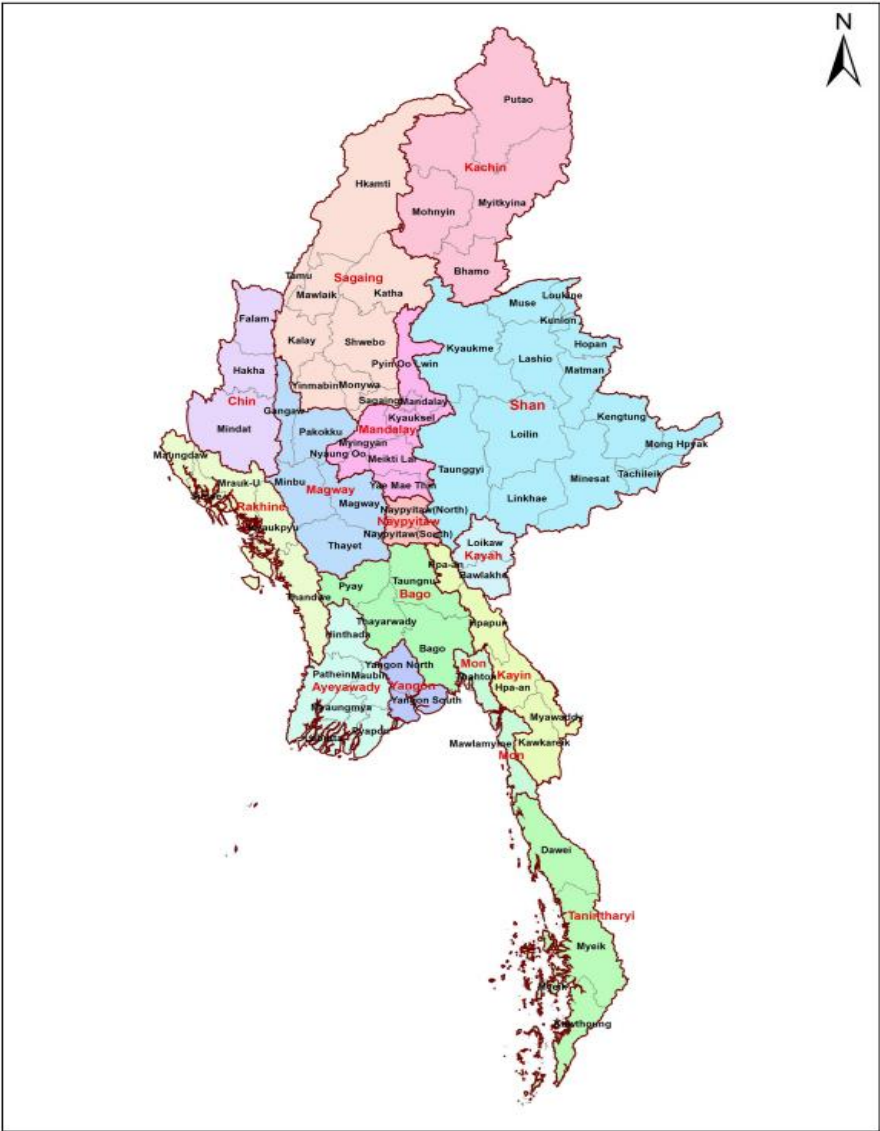


Figure 2.1 Map of Myanmar
 Source: Ministry of Immigration and Population (2015, p. I)

To understand the importance of CLCs in the context of Myanmar, it is important to understand its history. The next section provides an overview of the historical development in Myanmar from the pre-colonial period (the late 1800s) until the 2010 election, giving attention to Buddhism and its influence on the state and education. Then, the following sections introduce the current education system, the ongoing education reform process starting in 2011, and the CLC programme in Myanmar.

2.1 Historical Development from the Pre-colonial Period (the late 1800s) to 2010

The historical development of Myanmar is divided into three periods according to major events: the pre-colonial period prior to 1885, the British colonial period from 1886 to 1948, and the period after independence from 1948 to 2010. The last period is sub-divided into five short periods according to the change of governance: the first civilian government after independence (1948-1958), the “Caretaker” army-led government (1958-1960), the return of the civilian government (1960-1962), the first military government (1962-1988), and the second military government (1988-2010). The 2010 election marks the end of the second military government.

2.1.1 The Pre-colonial Period prior to 1885

Throughout history, Buddhism has played an important role in legitimizing political power in Myanmar; it has also influenced the social and cultural customs of Burmese society (Steinberg, 2010). Buddhism had a significant influence on the state, especially under the monarchy. In the pre-colonial period, prior to 1885, Myanmar had been under monarchical rule. Kingship was governed by “Buddhist theology and cosmology that mandated Sangha¹¹ participation in the state affairs” (Houtman, 1990, p. 48). The state and the Sangha were considered “two main institutions of Burmese society – ‘pillars’ holding up the Burmese house” (Aung-Thwin, 2013, p. 246).

Even though the state did not provide schooling, they provided material support and social assistance for the Sangha in fulfilling that responsibility while ensuring that the state’s ideology persists (Cheesman, 2003). As a result, all schooling was provided in the form of monastic education by monasteries. In Burmese, the word “school” and “monastery” have identical

¹¹ The monasteries of the Theravada Buddhist Order.

meaning (Cheesman, 2003). The word “education” has its root from the monasteries meaning “with connections to learning, wisdom and knowledge” (Houtman, 1990, p. 48). According to Houtman (1990), during this period, monastic education was provided for free by “harsh disciplinarian” monks with an emphasis on building moral conduct; it was “generally rural-based, decentralised and rigid, open to pupils irrespective of class or background, but not gender, as the monks’ religious code prevented them from teaching female students above a young age” (p. 49). Overall, this activity was “a voluntary village-based undertaking” which mainly relied on community support (Houtman, 1990, p. 49). This tradition and its influence on Burmese society in the pre-colonial period is summarized by Cheesman (2003) as follows:

[Monastic schooling] played a vital role in establishing, enhancing and preserving the authority of both the state and the Sangha. It was an explicit link between the people and their religion, and by extension, their state. It transmitted standardised cultural and intellectual matter across all sectors of society. It instilled a valuable sense of discipline that allowed rulers to maintain control over their subjects and reinforced a respect for tradition and hierarchy. It also mandated community participation and support, and was highly valued: proverbially, education became ‘the gold pot that cannot be stolen’ (p. 49).

In the nineteenth century, despite the domestic disputes over the kingdom and the threat of invasion from the British, King Mindon—“one of the ablest kings that Burma ever had” (Htin Aung, 1967, p. 233)—managed to reform the country’s trading and tax system, taking advantages of the transportation system developed by the British to make use of the rising importance of Rangoon¹² as an international port (Htin Aung, 1967). The country that had relied mainly on rice cultivation now also started to engage with international trade and develop small industries such as textile, rice and wheat production, mining (minerals), and timber (Htin Aung, 1967).

At the same time, the Burmese monarchy gradually lost its control of Myanmar to the British after three Anglo-Burmese wars. The first war in 1826 led to the annexation of Tavoy and Arakan regions. The second war in 1852 led to the annexation of Lower Myanmar. The last war in 1885 led to the final annexation of Myanmar as a province of British India in the same year (Cheesman, 2003).

¹² The ancient name of Yangon, the former capital of Myanmar. In 2005, the government changed its capital to Nay Pyi Taw (about 370 km northwest of Yangon).

2.1.2 The British Colonial Period from 1886 to 1948

After the first few years dealing with spontaneous uprisings across the country, the British colonial government managed to maintain economic development and restoration of law and order in the period of 1890 to 1920 (Htin Aung, 1967). The presence of British colonialism led to a dramatic shift of governance “from an order based on Buddhist principles and personal obligations to an indigenous king....to an order based on secular and impersonal foreign military and commercial interests imposed by British colonial government from outside” (Houtman, 1990, p. 26). To describe this change, Aung-Thwin (2013) uses the “pillar” metaphor: when the monarchy was abandoned, the newly replaced “pillar”, the bureaucratic British colonial government, could not maintain the balance with the remaining “pillar”, the Sangha. As a consequence, significant changes occurred and affected various aspects of the country.

One significant impact on rural villages was the abolishment of the position of the traditional village headman who “acted not only as an agent of the state or of the revenue grantee but also as a representative or protector of the village community” (Charney, 2009, p. 6). The headman exercised his power to facilitate communication and resolutions during the times of bad harvest and mediated conflicts in his local village. As an attempt to increase colonial control, the village headman was appointed by and worked dependently on the state; their responsibility in the village was rather rigid and superficial (Charney, 2009).

In terms of economic development, the highlights in this period include a massive increase in both the volume and the price of rice; a rapid expansion of the railway system; and a burgeoning export industry of oil, timber and other minerals (Htin Aung, 1967). Despite making progress, Myanmar also suffered severely from colonial exploitation—the profits mostly went to the hands of the British and foreigners but not the Burmese. For example, Burmese farmers did not earn profits from the massive increase in the price of rice. To extend arable land, Burmese farmers had to borrow money from Indian moneylenders with exorbitant rates while the British government neither made effort to intervene nor showed any intention to open banks for agricultural loans (Htin Aung, 1967). Moreover, both wholesale and retail rice trading was not in the hands of Burmese farmers. The former was controlled by British firms, the latter by Indian or Chinese merchants. Due to lack of policy to control remittances, the profits gained on Burmese soil were almost all sent back to England or India (Htin Aung, 1967).

Changes also occurred in the education system. Even though the British government failed to introduce secular subjects into the monastic curriculum, Christian missionaries and government secular schools gradually took over the role of Sangha; at the same time, it eroded the social structure on which the education system had been built (Houtman, 1990). In addition, Christian missionaries often showed favoritism towards Christian students. This not only provoked resentment from non-Christian students but also interrupted the long tradition of happy pupil-teacher relationship (Htin Aung, 1967). Furthermore, as a result of the constant promotion of British rulers combined with a promising prospect for those with good command of English—especially working as civil servants for the British government—Anglo-vernacular schools and English schools were preferred to monastic schools and vernacular schools¹³ (Cheesman, 2003; Thein Lwin, 2000). Education was not free and accessible to all—schools were built only in towns and cities which limited educational opportunities for the rural villagers (Htin Aung, 1967; Thein Lwin, 2000).

The colonial government executed the “divide-and-rule” policy that further deepened the divides between different ethnicities, especially the hill people (e.g., Karen, Kachin, Chin), by making them believe that they were not part of Myanmar (Htin Aung, 1967). This laid a foundation for the long-lasting ethnic conflicts that are still happening in the country today (Lall, 2016).

The last 20 years of this period witnessed several student-led strikes and political movements aiming to regain independence for Burmese people, not only from the British but also from India (Charney, 2009). In 1937, Myanmar was separated from British India to become a unit of the British Empire. This period also included a devastating three-year period, from 1942 to 1945, under the control of the Japanese military that had earlier used its military support in helping Burmese to fight against the British. At the end of World War II, Myanmar returned to British control, but gained independence from the British to become a sovereign republic in 1948 (Htin Aung, 1967).

The vision for the nation stipulated in the 1947 Constitution—mainly created by General Aung San, the political leader of the struggle for independence and the father of the 1991 Nobel Laureate and prominent political leader Aung San Suu Kyi—clearly emphasized religion and politics as two separate domains (Aung-Thwin, 2013). However, General Aung San had been

¹³ This was because these schools had Burmese as the medium of instruction.

assassinated before Myanmar officially became independent, leaving this issue, i.e. religion and politics, in the hands of his successors.

2.1.3 Myanmar from 1948 to 2010

The Newly Independent Myanmar: 1948-1958

After its independence, Myanmar became the Union of Myanmar, a parliamentary democracy. U Nu, the first Prime Minister of the Union, took the socialist approach to building the nation. His visions for the government were to curb the growth of capitalism dominated by foreign capitalists, control the outflow of capital, and reduce rampant inequalities (Charney, 2009). As a devout Buddhist, U Nu also made a deliberate effort to bring the Sangha closer to the state. However, he failed to re-establish the previous Sangha-state relationship because the new government was not a Buddhist monarchy but instead a secular and modern republic (Aung-Thwin, 2013).

At its independence, Myanmar had the highest literacy rate in Southeast Asia¹⁴, which was attributed to the teaching of monastic education (Spiro, 1982; Lall, 2008). In 1950 a new education policy was introduced and implemented (Thein Lwin, 2000). According to this new policy, all schools were centralized and depended on the state. The government recognized, yet remained cautious, about the role of monastic instruction in education (Cheesman, 2003). Burmese was used as the medium of instruction and the language in textbooks. There was no religious component in school subjects to accommodate and develop students' spiritual needs (Thein Lwin, 2000). Thein Lwin (2000) concludes that education in this period might have increased the divides between urban and rural, academic and vocational, as well as inequality of opportunities between boys and girls.

Under U Nu's administration, Myanmar was said to have "independence, but not unity" due to the reemergence of old political rivals and insurgencies of ethnic groups (Charney, 2009, p. 72). The government failed to resolve political issues before it took steps to address economic and social issues which further undermined the country's stability (Charney, 2009).

¹⁴ The government, on the other hand, claimed that the literacy rate dropped dramatically from 85% in 1886 to 35% in the colonial period. The rising literacy rate after independence until 2011 (about 95%) has been attributed to the government literacy programmes (MOE, 2012).

The Caretaker Government: 1958-1960

In 1958, there was a change of governance from a civilian government to military control led by General Ne Win—the Caretaker Government. This was not a result of a military coup but instead of an invitation from U Nu himself: the army was expected to ensure a free election scheduled to take place in April 1959 (Htin Maung, 1967; Charney, 2009). The army was believed to be the only effective institution that could keep the lawless situation under control and restore law and order (Aung-Thwin, 2013).

As promised, the Caretaker Government took steps to eliminate bureaucracy and corruption by government officials by opening training and reorientation classes (Charney, 2009). They also showed determination in cleaning up the streets and improving the sanitation situation in Rangoon. One of the effective initiatives of this period was the establishment of the National Solidarity Associations that were organized across the country at different administrative levels. The aim was to increase the communication between the citizens and the government through developing democratic and peaceful conditions for social and economic activities (Charney, 2009). This brief “caretaker” period is believed to have brought Myanmar “closer towards a secular, socialist state” which further damaged the relationship between the Sangha and the state (Aung-Thwin, 2013, p. 295).

The Return of the Civilian Government: 1960-1962

U Nu won the election and returned to office while the army kept its promise to relinquish control. It is believed that U Nu received overwhelming support because of his campaign promise to make Buddhism the national religion—a move that was condemned by opposition political parties as a way to exploit religion against the Constitution (Charney, 2009; Aung-Thwin, 2013). The government’s subsequent actions to keep that promise faced opposition from various non-Buddhist groups (e.g., Chins, Kachins, Karens) for fear of losing the freedom of religion and being relegated to second-class citizens (Charney, 2009). From this period onward, the Sangha gradually lost its influence in the political domain, submitting to the state’s authority (Aung-Thwin, 2013).

The First Military Government: 1962-1988

On 2 March 1962, General Ne Win launched a coup that led Myanmar under the control of the army-led Revolutionary Council. The Council immediately announced a secular approach to

socialism by stopping the support for Buddhism, allowing freedom of religion and freedom of the press (Charney, 2009; Aung-Thwin, 2013). In April 1962, the Council announced its plan, “the Burmese Way to Socialism”, aiming to remove all self-interest and economic motives by making all means of production owned by the state become cooperatives and unions. It also aimed to reduce income inequalities and promote unity (Charney, 2009). Overall, this plan is said to be a mixture of Marxist ideology and Leninist implementation to achieve Buddhist goals (Aung-Thwin, 2013). In 1974, the Revolutionary Council was replaced by the Burma Socialist Programme Party as a result of the 1974 Constitution. In reality, except for the name, everything else mostly remained the same (Charney, 2009).

The military government’s approach subsequently transferred Myanmar into “an inward-looking, one party totalitarian state under a highly centralised, military-dominated administration” (Cheesman, 2003, p. 55). For example, the press had no freedom as the Council had promised; instead, private newspapers ceased to exist due to government bans. Activities that were considered to be influenced by Western ideologies, e.g. beauty contests or horseracing, were also banned (Charney, 2009). The state also revoked all pro-Buddhism regulations that had been established during U Nu’s administration which sparked monastic opposition across the country (Charney, 2009).

Under this one-party rule, all schools were nationalized, Christian schools were abolished, and monastic schools could continue in the rural areas (Thein Lwin, 2000). Burmese became the language of instruction in all schools. In this system, science subjects were privileged over art-related subjects, which led to discrimination in job opportunities. Only those who followed the science path¹⁵ were considered capable and thus able to get jobs that those who followed arts subjects could not (Thein Lwin, 2000). The highlight in education was that in 1971 Myanmar was awarded the “Mohammad Reza Pahlavi Prize” by UNESCO for making progress in adult literacy through the literacy campaign of 3Rs (Read, Write and Arithmetic). This successful campaign was based on student volunteers, community participation, and mobilization of local resources on a voluntary basis (Thein Lwin, 2000).

The policies in this period not only isolated Myanmar from the international community but also contributed to the social and economic deterioration of the country. By 1986, national debts

¹⁵ Students who could follow the science path were selected based on their performance in examinations at a very early age.

had significantly increased while export dramatically decreased (Charney, 2009). The situation continued to worsen until early 1988 when riots broke out as a consequence of the long-term suppressed frustration. Small student protests in Rangoon grew in numbers and spread to other regions within a few months. Saw Maung, Ne Win's close associate, staged a *coup d'état* that led to the establishment of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), later changed to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)¹⁶.

The Second Military Government: 1988-2010

Even though the SLORC/SPDC announced that one of its immediate tasks was to restore law and order—as its name indicates—in the first two years after the coup, the military government was primarily occupied with the preparation of the multi-party election to take place in 1990. The military government lost the election to the NLD headed by Aung San Suu Kyi and her colleagues (Charney, 2009) but failed to honor the election results and remained in power (Thein Lwin, 2000).

In the following years, Myanmar underwent a period of turbulence resulting from political rivalries both within the SLORC/SPDC and between the SLORC/SPDC and other political parties, particularly the NLD. Under the firm control of the military government, Myanmar faced serious economic and political stagnation and at the same time, a deterioration of social infrastructure (Wilson & Skidmore, 2008). It has also suffered from a long-lasting civil war between the military government and armed ethnic groups. Besides, Myanmar faced increasing pressure from the international community to undertake democratic and human rights reforms (Charney, 2009).

Civil society organizations and NGOs were given space to develop, especially through the support of the emerging middle class with their education and business links. However, the work of these organizations was limited to development, education, and health (Lall, 2016). In 2007, the worsening political situation in Myanmar caught international attention because of the “Saffron Revolution”—protests of monks, starting from hundreds to thousands, in Yangon. However, there were controversies over whether the “monks” participating in the protests were real or bogus since real monks are supposed to be apolitical (Aung-Thwin, 2013). What is certain is that the influence of Buddhism on the state decreased over the years (Cheesman,

¹⁶ The name was changed in 1997 to renew the party's image in an attempt to join ASEAN (Charney, 2009).

2003). The election in November 2010 and subsequent events brought about a new government which—even though it is still heavily influenced by the military—signifies a transition to a more democratic society.

The education policies in this period made schooling “universal (in principle), centralised and homogeneous, administered by government departments operating from the capital” (Cheesman, 2003, p. 56). The education system deteriorated as a consequence of decades of underinvestment, weak institutions, and civil strife (Lall, 2008; Higgins, Maber, Cardozo & Shah, 2016). In some rural areas, there were no public schools either because the government never built one or because teachers refused to go there (Lorch, 2008). Moreover, due to financial constraints, many poor parents were forced to keep their children out of school or to seek for alternatives to formal schooling (Thein Lwin, 2000; Han Tin, 2008; Lall, 2008). Non-state education, most dominantly monastic education, has played a critical role in serving the poor in areas where state provision of education was absent (Thein Lwin, 2000; Lorch, 2008; MOE, 2014). The problem is even more severe for other ethnic groups since Burmese is the only official language used in textbooks (Lall, 2016). In the mid-2000s, burgeoning private education at all levels was not only a response to an increasing demand of middle class Burmese but also the catalyst for civil society movement (Lall, 2016).

2.2 Education in Myanmar

The previous section has touched upon changes in education in Myanmar throughout its history which has been related to the interplay of secular and religious values. This section examines the current education system in Myanmar and the ongoing education reform process initiated in 2011 in order to discuss the CLC programme in the wider educational context of the country.

2.2.1 Overview of the Education System

The vision of Myanmar’s current education system is “To create an education system that can generate a learning society capable of facing the challenges of the Knowledge Age” under the motto “To build a modern developed nation through education” (MOE, 2013, p. 19). Section 28 of the 2008 Constitution states that “the Union shall implement [a] free, compulsory primary education system” and, according to section 366, that “Every citizen...has the right to education” and “shall be given basic education...as compulsory” (GOM, 2008).

Myanmar has a diverse education system including government schools, monastic schools, private schools, and other ethnic education systems (Lall, 2016). The education system consists of five sub-sectors: Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), Basic Education, NFE¹⁷, Higher Education, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). Monastic, private, community, and ethnic education schools are not listed as parts of the education system even though the government acknowledges that there is a significant number of students who access basic education through those channels (MOE, 2016). Except for basic education and the NFE sub-sectors, which are primarily managed by the Ministry of Education (MOE), provision and services of other sub-sectors are co-provided by two or more ministries. In total, there are 19 ministries—13 of which in higher education alone—involved in education (MOE, 2012; Lall, 2016).

The MOE has ten departments¹⁸: the Minister’s Office; two Departments of Higher Education for Lower and Upper Myanmar; three Departments of Basic Education for Lower Myanmar, Upper Myanmar and Yangon; the Department of Education Planning and Training; the Myanmar Board of Examination; the Myanmar Research Bureau; and the Department of Myanmar Language Commission (UNICEF, 2013). In the financial year 2012-2013, most of the national education budget, 86%, is allocated to the Department of Basic Education, a significant proportion, 10%, to the Department of Higher Education, leaving the rest for the remaining departments (UNICEF, 2013).

Basic Education is under the management of the MOE. It has a 5:4:2 structure meaning five years of primary education (Kindergarten to grade 4), four years of lower secondary education and two years of upper secondary education. Schooling starts at the age of 5 and ends at the age of 16. As of 2013, there were more than 43,000 basic education schools serving more than 8.5 million students (MOE, 2014).

There are several alternatives to government education. At the lower end of the system, monastic schools have served children from disadvantaged families who are not able to afford government education. The monastic schools operate under the administration of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Department for the Promotion and Propagation of the Sasana. They

¹⁷ In some recent documents, NFE is replaced by “Alternative Education” in order to be consistent with the name of the department responsible for NFE activities, Department of Alternative Education.

¹⁸ At the time of my fieldwork, restructuring led to merging and renaming some departments (Personal Communication, July, 2016).

also receive support from the MOE as well as NGOs, INGOs, and local well-wishers (MOE, 2014). As of 2013, there were more than 1,500 monastic schools teaching over 263,000 students using the government curriculum (MOE, 2014). At the upper end of the system, private education, mushrooming since the mid-2000s, has provided popular education and specialist training in English, Chinese, business, and computer for the middle class and the rich (Lall, 2016).

Myanmar has a very high drop-out rate and a sizable out-of-school population: more than 50% drop out when they reach upper secondary school and more than 40% of children aged 14-15 years are out of school (MOE, 2013). Reasons for dropping out include poverty, financial constraints, and insufficient educational provision by the state (MOE, 2013). Besides, there is a high opportunity cost of sending children to school for parents in the rural areas who need their children to help with their work (Lall, 2016). In addition, as a consequence of the failed state education system, youth are left with a negative experience of formal schooling (Higgins et al., 2016). Ethnic students also face a language barrier as Burmese is the only official language used in the textbooks (Lall, 2016).

2.2.2 The Education Reform Process and Involvement of Development Partners

After the 2010 election, the new government initiated reforms in several sectors in order to improve the socio-economic situation in the country. In education, several international organizations have been involved in the reform process in order to support the government both financially and technically (Lall, 2016).

President Thein Sein, the first president of the new government, mentioned in his inaugural speech that education is one of the priorities that his government would be working on:

We need more and more human resources of intellectuals and intelligentsia in building a modern, developed democratic nation. In this regard, a fundamental requirement is the development of human resources including new generations who will take over State duties. Therefore, we will promote the nation's education standard to meet the international level and encourage human resource development (NLM, 2011, p. 4).

He also listed specific issues that would be included in the working agendas, and welcomed working with international organizations in achieving the goals:

we will practise free compulsory primary education system, improve the standards of present universities, colleges, and high, middle and primary schools, provide more teaching aids, sharpen the abilities and improve the socio-economic status of educational staff, and increase the enrolment rates in middle and high schools. In that regard, we will work in cooperation with international organizations including the UN, INGOs, and NGOs. We will promulgate necessary laws for private education schools. Moreover, we will provide stipends for higher education abroad and stipends for outstanding students at home (NLM, 2011, p. 6).

One year later, in May 2012, President Thein Sein announced “the second stage of reforms” which was followed by the Framework for Economic and Social Reform (FESR) that outlines priorities for Myanmar in the three-year period from 2012 to 2015, as part of a long term reform process that “will allow Myanmar to become a modern, developed and democratic nation by 2030” (GOM, 2013, p. 1). Education is listed as one of the government’s top four priorities. This document also shows a determination to improve the quality and quantity of education by increasing the education budget, and putting in place an overarching education sector reform policy and strategy. Specifically:

this reform policy and strategy will focus on the need to expand the system of basic education from eleven to twelve years, on child-centred teaching methodologies, upgrading teacher training and other curriculum reforms necessary to enhance the quality of basic education, on teacher remuneration and broader issues of education financing, on establishing a rigorous system for education quality assessment and performance, and on further reforms in the management of basic education including the importance of active engagement in the process by the parents themselves (GOM, 2013, p. 29).

In line with this agenda, the government identified several education policy frameworks to be reviewed, revised, or developed. The suggested tasks include: 1) reviewing and revising existing laws related to the Basic Education sub-sector; 2) developing and implementing rules and regulations according to the Private School Registration Law (2011); 3) developing and implementing the Free, Compulsory Primary Education Law; 4) creating a Policy framework and enhancing advocacy for ECCD; 5) developing NFE policies in order to guide the implementation of NFE activities; 6) increasing the education budget as well as considering a separate budget for ECCD and NFE; and 7) developing policies for educational cooperation with UN agencies, NGOs, and INGOs (MOE, 2012).

To support the accomplishment of those tasks, the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) was launched in 2012 to review all areas in the education sub-sectors. The priorities are to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the system in order to identify key areas for the reform; to develop evidence-based policies, legislation, and education sector improvements; and to develop a costed education sector plan (Lall, 2016). The review was led by the government, taking into account suggestions from various education stakeholders including “parents, community members, representatives of various ethnic and religious groups, those concerned with monastic education, community-based groups, international NGOs (INGOs) and local NGOs, DPs¹⁹, Members of Hlutaw²⁰, state and regional Chief Ministers, state and regional Ministers, and political groups”²¹ (MOE, 2013, p. 19).

The CESR was implemented in three phases: Phase 1 – Rapid Assessment, Phase 2 – In-depth Analysis, and Phase 3 – Developing a Costed Education Plan. The findings from Phase 1 – Rapid Assessment suggested that there was no overarching legislation to coordinate all education sub-sectors and to guide the implementation of education activities; no NFE policy to coordinate NFE activities; and no policy to coordinate all education stakeholders. Besides, the review emphasized a need to revise some existing laws that did not reflect the current situation (MOE, 2013).

After three and a half years, the costed evidence-based National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) (2016-2021) was published in 2016 as the outcome of the CESR’s third phase. This document aims to “[provide] the government and citizens with a comprehensive, evidence-based ‘roadmap’ that will dramatically improve access to quality education for students at all levels of the national educational system” (MOE, 2016, p. 7). It outlines nine transformational shifts driving the sector-wide education reforms to be implemented in the period 2016-2021 (MOE, 2016, p. 21):

- **Preschool and Kindergarten Education:** All children get a head start on their learning pathway through accessing quality preschool and kindergarten education.

¹⁹ Development partners.

²⁰ The Burmese Parliament.

²¹ This review, however, did not receive political support even from the MOE. The CESR was opposed by the NLD that questioned its inclusiveness. The NLD implemented its own National Network for Education Reform for the same purpose (Lall, 2016). Lall (2016) discusses various challenges regarding the implementation of CESR.

- Basic education – access, quality and inclusion: All children can access progress through and successfully complete quality basic education.
- Basic education curriculum: All school children develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies that are relevant to their lives and to the socio-economic development needs of 21st century.
- Student assessment and examinations: Teach and education managers implement a quality assessment system to improve student learning achievement.
- Teacher education and management: Teachers support, development and apply interactive classroom teaching and learning benefiting all students.
- Alternative education: Learners can access and graduate from quality-assured, certified and nationally credentialed alternative education programmes to achieve their learning and career aspirations.
- TVET: More learners can access TVET and graduate from quality-assured and labour market-responsive TVET programme under a more effective TVET management system.
- Higher education: Students have equitable access to a world-class higher education system, leading to better opportunities for employment and significant contributions to a knowledge-based economy.
- Management, capacity development, and quality assurance: Education managers at all levels apply evidence-based decision making and demand accountability for improved teaching and learning in schools and education institutions.

According to this plan, NFE (or alternative education) is considered an important means to realize the potential of out-of-school youths and adults by providing second-chance education through multiple pathways. To achieve this goal, the NESP (2016-2021) stipulates three strategies: 1) Strengthen coordination and management; 2) Expand access through multiple NFE pathways; and 3) Strengthen the quality of NFE programmes.

Particularly relevant to CLCs is the second strategy, i.e., Expand access through multiple NFE pathways. This strategy has four programme components (MOE, 2016, p. 39):

- Programme component 1 includes expanding Primary School Equivalency Programmes and Basic Literacy and Functional Literacy Programmes in “disadvantaged areas with the highest number of children dropping out of primary school”;
- Programme component 2 includes a Middle School Equivalency Programme that is to be piloted and implemented nationwide “through a combination of government, non-government and private sector organisations”;
- Programme component 3 includes a National Youth Education Certificate as “a pathway for out-of-school youth who would like to continue their non-formal education into TVET, higher education and employment”; and
- Programme component 4 aims at “[strengthening] the capacity of Community Learning Centres (CLCs) to provide quality and demand-responsive non-formal education”.

Involvement of Development Partners

Several development partners have contributed to the progress made. The most active ones are UNICEF, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID)²², the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom (UKAID/DFID), and the European Union (Lall, 2016). Among them, UNICEF, and JICA have been present in the country for quite a long time. JICA has run its own programmes, often without collaboration with other Western aid agencies. It is currently working with the government on textbook and curriculum reforms in basic education (Lall, 2016).

AusAID/DFAT, with the support of other development partners, has led the education reforms. It was also the principal contributor to the undertaking of the CESR. In collaboration with UKAID/DFID and the Danish International Development Agency (Danida), AusAID/DFAT initiated the Myanmar Education Consortium (MEC), a programme aiming to increase access to and completion of quality basic education. The programme mainly provides funding for partner organizations engaging in early childhood, non-formal and informal activities. However, there have been controversies over the transparency of the MEC in providing the funding (Lall, 2016). The World Bank has also increased its involvement in education in

²² AusAID was recently integrated into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

Myanmar, particularly supporting decentralization of education through a school grants and a student stipend programme. Besides, NGOs and INGOs have been working on other challenging issues, such as the language of instruction for students of the ethnic minorities, education in emergencies and in conflict-affected areas (Lall, 2016).

The education reforms aim to cover all major areas including NFE. One of the programme components refers to CLCs in order to provide educational opportunities outside of the formal system and to address specific needs of the communities. The background and historical development of the CLC programme in Myanmar and its scope of activities are discussed in the following.

2.2.3 CLCs in Myanmar

In Myanmar, the CLC concept was first introduced in 1994 as a component of the Human Development Initiative programme funded by UNDP (Middelborg, 2002) and in accordance with the APPEAL definition (see Chapter 1). In the beginning, CLCs were established for the purpose of providing continuing education, especially for those who had already achieved basic literacy in order to further develop literacy skills and other activities, such as income generation and quality of life improvement (ACCU, 1999). Continuing education was widely understood to include all types of educational opportunities that formal education was unable to provide (Thaung Tut, 1999). The target beneficiaries were Parent-Teacher Association members, drop-outs and out-of-school youths, adult illiterates, income-generating groups, under-privileged groups and individuals (students and villagers).

CLC activities were implemented in five major areas: 1) literacy and post-literacy programmes; 2) development of community information and resource services (library, village newsletter, wall news charts, video shows); 3) individual interests (outdoors and indoors, games and sports); 4) development of capacity building (lectures, debates, short-term courses, skill-based training); and 5) promotion of life-experience and skill/income generating groups (e.g., poultry farming, food, preservation, localized cottage-industry) (Thaung Tut, 1999, p. 22). In 1999, the first national workshop on developing continuing education through CLCs was organized to take stock of the implementing experiences of CLCs in Myanmar as well as to develop materials and strategies for establishing and managing CLCs with community participation (ACCU, 1999).

From 1994 to 2001, the number of CLCs increased ten times, from 7 to 71 CLCs in 11 townships located in three different socio-economic zones. These townships were reported to share the following characteristics: “remoteness, isolation, landlessness, unemployment, underemployment, dependency on one cash crop, high disease prevalence rate, high drop-out and repetition rates in primary education, and a significant number of out-of-school children” (Middelborg, 2002, p. iii). Since then, the number has grown significantly to 3,040 CLCs across the country (MOE, 2013)²³.

Table 2.1 Number of CLCs in Myanmar by State and Region, 2013

State	Number of CLC	Region	Number of CLC
Kachin	57	Sagaing	217
Kayah	10	Tanintharyi	99
Kayin	27	Bago (East)	27
Chin	43	Bago (West)	7
Mon	757	Magway	60
Rakhine	186	Mandalay	130
Shan (South)	226	Yangon	22
Shan (North)	156	Ayeyarwaddy	328
Shan (East)	688	-	-
Total	2150	Total	890
Grand Total			3040

Source: CESR (MOE, 2013, p. 250)

As appears in Table 2.1, there were CLCs in all States and Regions in 2013. The highest number was in Mon state (757 CLCs) and the lowest in Bago (West) (7 CLCs). This impressive number may have resulted from past CLCs’ success, encouragement from the government, and the recognition of CLCs as part of the alternative learning programmes integrated into the lifelong learning approach promoted by UNESCO (Middelborg, 2002; MOE, 2014; UNESCO, 2013). Besides, the CLC programme is considered as a NFE programme that can contribute to rural development and poverty alleviation in Myanmar (MOE, 2012, p. 4).

There are some inconsistencies showing the lack of a systematic approach to managing CLCs in Myanmar. First, the number of CLCs and libraries partly overlaps resulting in unreliable

²³ The most updated number is 3,077 according to the NESP (2016-2021). This study uses the statistics from the first phase of the CESR (2013) because it provides the numbers of CLCs in each State and Region contrast to the NESP (2016-2021).

statistics (Personal Communication, August 2016). For example, the government reported that there were 2,742 CLCs in 2012 (MOE, 2012), 3,040 in 2013 (as above) and 3,077 in 2016 (MOE, 2016). Even if the number of CLCs increased, the degree of increase in such a short period of time is questionable, especially since many were neither functional nor sustainable (MEC, 2013).

Second, according to the CESR, CLCs are under the management of the Myanmar Literacy Resource Centre (MLRC) (Figure 2.2). In an ideal scenario, MLRC uses its technical capacity to support a local education unit, the Township Education For All Committee, to manage the CLCs in the respective townships. The CLC Management Committee is locally formed, consisting of local villagers who are responsible for managing CLCs under the guidance of the respective township education unit and the MLRC. The CLC Management Committee with the support of a Technical Team supervises various thematic task groups that are responsible for organizing their own activities (MOE, 2013).²⁴

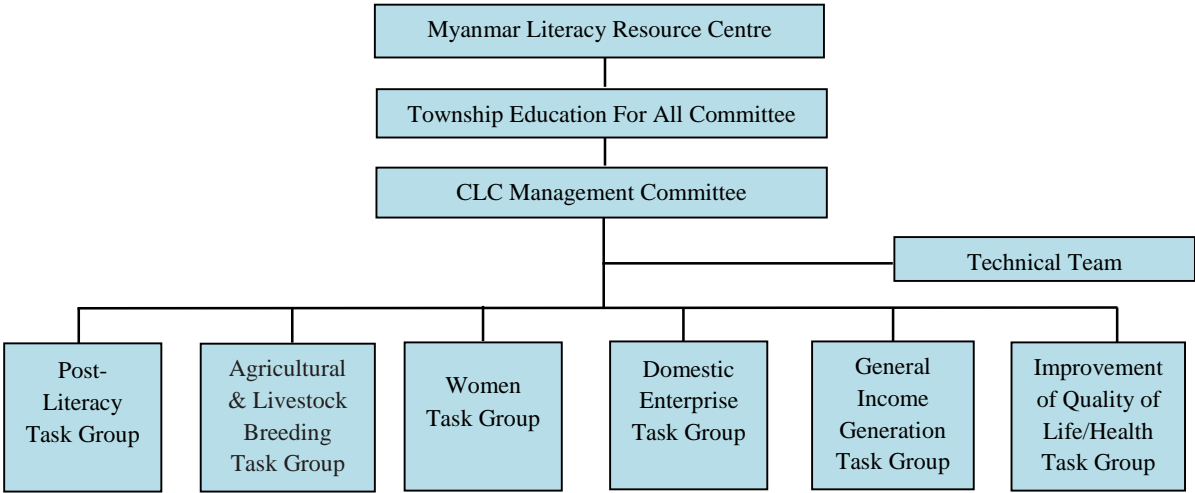


Figure 2.2 Organizational Set-up of CLCs in Myanmar
 Source: Comprehensive Education Sector Review (MOE, 2013, p. 251)

Even though communities are encouraged to establish CLCs to “serve as venues for activities concerning education, health, socioeconomic initiatives, and culture”, in practice, most of the CLCs are not sustainable (MOE, 2013, p. 29). A field survey of 44 CLCs in 11 Regions and

²⁴ However, according to my interviews with MLRC, this was not the case since the Ministry does not have the capacity to supervise all CLCs and needs external support to do so.

States conducted by MEC in 2013 showed that some CLCs were functioning as libraries and some had stopped functioning (MEC, 2013). The government has called for needs-assessment studies to be conducted in CLCs in order “to provide relevant technical support and build capacities as necessary so that they can, in turn, contribute to the community development and poverty reduction in the country” (MOE, 2014, p. 28). Even though the MOE indicates that CLCs is one of the programme components to expand access to NFE, it may take some time to see its effect because the development of the NFE policy framework is still in progress. Moreover, at this moment, the NESP (2016-2021) seems to have a priority on youth and out-of-school children through the non-formal primary education programme (NFPE).

As discussed previously, Myanmar has undergone several dramatic political changes which severely affected the country socially and economically. Buddhism still maintains an influence on the society but not as strongly as before. The election in 2010 and the events which led to a new government and several reforms have raised the hope for change in Myanmar. In education, the government has taken steps to reform the current system starting with a comprehensive review of all education sub-sectors. This resulted in a new education framework that highlights nine transformational shifts to be taken in the next five years. The CLC programme, which has existed in Myanmar since 1998, is identified as a component of the NFE sector aiming to provide additional education opportunities for out-of-school children and adults.

Before proceeding to the analysis of the selected CLS in Myanmar, the analytical framework and the research design and methodology will be presented.

3 Analytical Framework

The purposes of this study are to understand how the Padaung CLCs operate, the roles of stakeholders in their operation, and how the CLCs contribute to the betterment of the villagers and their communities. To serve these purposes, the social capital lens has been applied. The origin of the social capital concept is not new and can be traced back to sociological discussions in the nineteenth century (Portes, 1998). Portes (1998) argues that the novelty of social capital lies in its focus on the positive features of sociability and its attention to how nonmonetary forms can be a source of power and influence. The concept has also been used in development studies that focus on how social connections at the community level can contribute to poverty alleviation, agricultural extension, and sustainable development (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Uphoff, 2000; Pretty, 2002; Dale & Newman, 2010).

The analytical framework in this study was primarily built on Nan Lin's and Norman Uphoff's discussions of social capital since, together, they permitted to address all aspects of the study. Nan Lin's social capital theory provides explanations for understanding the motive for action in a social network in order to gain and maintain resources. This laid the foundation for understanding the CLC operation. Norman Uphoff's discussions on the two forms of social capital, namely, social and structural capital, guided the interpretation of CLC contributions to individuals and their communities.

3.1 Nan Lin's Social Capital Theory

The fundamental premise of Lin's (2002) social capital theory is that through social connections individuals can access and capture embedded resources in a social network, which can enhance the outcomes of their actions. Therefore, social capital is understood as "a social asset by virtue of actors' connections and access to resources in the network or group of which they are members" (p. 19) and it includes "resources (e.g., wealth, power, and reputation, as well as social networks) of other individual actors to whom an individual actor can gain access through direct or indirect social ties" (p. 43). According to this definition, resources can be understood in forms of physical goods (e.g., money) or symbolic goods (e.g., knowledge, reputation). Each society (or group, community) assigns differential values to resources according to their own historical, geographical, and collective experiences. The value of resources also depends on the scarcity relative to the demand for or expectations of the resources.

By gaining access to and capturing the embedded resources in a social group, the outcomes of actions can be enhanced for four reasons. First, social ties between members and their social group can facilitate the *flow of information* because, on the one hand, individuals can gain access to the information that the group possesses which can be used for their personal benefits. On the other hand, through these ties, the group becomes aware of existing personal resources of its members (e.g. knowledge and talents) which may otherwise remain unrecognized. Second, some social ties may exert *influence* on actors who are in positions to make decisions in a group. Individuals who participate in a social group may gain personal benefits by having access to someone who is in a position to influence group decision. Third, individuals with social ties, or acknowledged relationships, may receive more *social credentials*. This is because a group may perceive individuals with these social ties as having access to social capital that may be different from its own; this individual's own social capital may be useful to the group. Fourth, on a personal level, connections to a social group serve as a *reinforcement* of one's worthiness as a member and their legitimacy in claiming the group's resources. In other words, social ties reinforce identity and recognition (Lin, 2002, pp. 19-20).

A social group tends to confer higher status to individuals who possess more valued resources for two reasons. First, it reinforces the consensus of the group on the valued resources which in turn promotes unity and thus the survival and persistence of the group. Second, by acknowledging individuals with more valued resources and protecting their claim to those resources, the loyalty of these individuals to the community is reinforced. Consequently, individuals with higher valued resources are more likely to be involved in the decision-making process which can be influenced by their self-interest or their own goals. The way in which these actors exercise the authority vested in them depends on their own experiences in socialization and professionalization (Lin, 2002, pp. 31-32).

Because the collective reputation of a group is made up of individual members' reputation, the group's overall reputation increases with enhanced member reputation. Furthermore, this is a reason for individuals to identify themselves with a more reputable group. These reinforcing processes strengthen group identification and group solidarity. A group may also recruit individuals with an already established reputation expecting them to recruit more members or build up a group's reputation. In exchange, these individuals receive recognition and reputation conferred by the group (Lin, 2002, pp. 152-154).

Once individuals are already granted access to embedded resources, it is assumed that their actions are based on two primary motives: to maintain or preserve the existing valued resources (that are already at their disposal) and to gain additional valued resources (that are not at their disposal). In other words, valued resources are acquired for the purpose of survival and persistence of both the collectivities and individuals (Lin, 2002, pp. 45-46).

The interactions between individuals in a social network can be characterized by two types: homophilous and heterophilous. Homophilous interaction refers to the type of interactions between individuals who share similar resources or characteristics. The more similar they are in terms of resources and interests, the easier it is to initiate and facilitate interactions. On the other hand, heterophilous interaction refers to the type of interactions between individuals with dissimilar resources. Individuals are motivated to gain additional resources, thus interactions between those with unequal resources also occur. While it is clear why individuals with fewer resources are motivated to interact with those with more resources, the motive for actions in the opposite direction requires some explanation. Lin argues that there are unequal exchanges when individuals with higher resources perceive an ultimate reward which could be in terms of economic gain (e.g., wealth) or social gain (e.g., reputation – the extent of recognition in a social network). Therefore, according to Lin's argument, individuals are motivated by self-interests and their actions are taken when there is a perceived gain (Lin, 2002).

Lin's construction of social capital theory offers a detailed analytical framework for explaining social structures and interactions among individuals within social groups for the purpose of maintaining and gaining social resources to enhance the outcomes of actions. It also sheds light on the roles of different actors involved in that process. However, it seems to assume that actions are taken based primarily on the cost-benefit calculation in order to maximize utility, which identifies with an economic way of thinking. Another way of understanding social action stems from sociology that sees individuals as socialized actors whose actions are influenced by the social context, specifically norms, rules, and obligations (Coleman, 1988). This applies to the Myanmar context, particularly the research sites, where the majority of people practice Buddhism which is believed to have strongly influenced their attitudes and beliefs as explained in Chapter 2. Therefore, the social context must be taken into account. Lin's framework has merits but can be complemented by other understandings in order to establish a pertinent lens for analysis in this study.

3.2 Other Perspectives on Social Capital

Bourdieu (1986) has a similar line of thinking as Lin when he sees social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p. 248). Specific connections with a group can bring material benefits as well as symbolic benefits to the possessor. Therefore, in Bourdieu’s thinking, social capital is treated as instrumental because through social connections, individuals can get access to different forms of resources such as economic resources, cultural capital, or affiliation with institutions that confer valued credentials (Portes, 1998). It is through the process of exchange among members in a group that mutual knowledge and recognition of membership are produced, thus this process reproduces the group (Bourdieu, 1986).

Coleman (1990) defines social capital as made of different entities that “consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure” (p. 302). In his view, certain aspects of the social structure are identified by their function that is “the value of those aspects of social structures to actors, as resources that can be used by the actors to realize their interests” (p. 305). By stressing the value perceived by each person, this definition allows flexibility in understanding different outcomes for different people in a social structure. Social relations, which constitute social capital, can facilitate information sharing which in turn facilitates actions. Social capital can also be combined with other forms of capital in order to enhance outcomes of individuals. Compared with two other popular forms of capital, namely physical capital and human capital, social capital is the least tangible, if at all, because it is embodied in the relationships among people. Furthermore, different from the other two types, social capital has a public-good aspect, i.e., it is “not the private property of any of the persons who benefit from it” (p. 315). Therefore, its benefits are more likely shared and experienced by people of the same social structure.

In line with the sociological thinking are Woolcock and Narayan (2000) who define social capital as “norms and networks that enable people to act collectively” (p. 225). According to the authors, this definition shifts the focus from the consequences to sources of social capital. It also takes community as the unit of analysis while recognizing that individuals can appropriate social capital themselves. Moreover, it allows for different dimensions of social capital that can be accessed by the community.

Narayan (1999) defines social capital as “the glue that holds groups and societies together – bonds of shared values, norms, institutions” (p. 1). He also introduces the concept of “bonding” social capital—horizontal social connections within a community—and “bridging” social capital—vertical social connections between one community with other communities or organizations. Bridging and bonding ties, which are part of social network formation, are argued to help overcome the challenges in sustainable community development by creating linkages within and outside the community. While the former contributes to augmenting agency of community members, the latter increases access to resources hitherto beyond the community’s boundaries (Dale & Newman, 2010).

Similarly, Pretty (2002), argues that social connections which constitute social capital can be examined in different contexts: *local connections* (“between and among individuals and within local communities”); *local-local connections* (“horizontal connections between and among groups within communities or between communities”); *local-external connections* (“vertically-oriented connections between local groups and external agencies or organizations”); *external connections* (“connections between and among individuals who are operating within external agencies”); *external-external connections* (“horizontal connections among external agencies, leading to collaborative partnerships and integrated approaches to development”) (p. 50).

Trust in social relations is one of the important elements to facilitate exchanges and cooperative actions between individuals (Pretty, 2002). High level of trust in a social environment strengthens the confidence in individuals that reciprocity expectation will be fulfilled (Pretty, 2002; Coleman, 1990). Trust can be promoted through informal institutions (e.g., norms, values, social sanctions) or formal institutions (e.g., rule of law, school curricular) (Narayan, 1999).

Portes (1998), through a review of social capital literature, suggests that social capital has three basic functions: “a source of social control”; “a source of family support”; and “a source of benefits through extrafamilial networks” (p. 9). Woolcock and Narayan (2000) suggest nine topics in studies of social capital: “families and youth behavior; schooling and education; community life (virtual and civic); work and organizations; democracy and governance; collective action; public health and environment; crime and violence; and economic development” (p. 229).

This study can be placed under community participation and collective action. Social capital is developed through establishing networks within the community, and between the community and outside organisations. The benefits of social capital are generated primarily through interpersonal and extrafamilial connections.

Social norms, which set expectations for social behavior in a specific community, can also “constitute a powerful form of social capital” because they facilitate certain types of actions while constraining others (Coleman, 1990, p. 311). Norms are also one of the primary components in Uphoff’s cognitive social capital which, as will be discussed below, rationalize behaviors to make it “respectable”.

3.3 Uphoff’s Two Forms of Social Capital

According to Uphoff (2000):

Social capital is an accumulation of various types of social, psychological, cultural, cognitive, institutional, and related assets that increase the amount (or probability) of mutually beneficial cooperative behavior. This is behavior that is productive for others as well as for one's self (p. 216).

Therefore, social capital is expected to be collectively, rather than individually, beneficial. Social capital can be categorized into structural and cognitive forms. Structural forms of social capital can be divided into a primary and a secondary form. Primary forms include *roles* (formal and informal), *rules* (explicit and implicit) and *social relationships* (“broad or specific patterns of exchange and cooperation that involve material and non-material goods”). Secondary forms include *procedures* (“processes or routines for carrying out activities based on roles and rules”) and *precedents* (“previous actions and outcomes that establish validity and values of roles, rules and procedures”) (p. 240). Structural social capital facilitates mutually collective beneficial action because they “make productive outcomes from cooperation more predictable and beneficial” (p. 218).

Cognitive forms of social capital include *norms*, *values*, *attitudes* and *beliefs* that are embodied in the orientation towards *others* and orientation towards *actions*. Cognitive social capital in orientation towards *others* (how we should *think* about others) develops trust and reciprocity as means to achieve solidarity. Cognitive social capital in orientation towards *actions* (how we should *act* towards others) promotes cooperation as means to achieve generosity. Other

characteristics that also contribute are fairness, honesty, and participation (pp. 241-242). Cognitive social capital is mental products that are reinforced by culture and ideology. Various forms of cognitive social capital are conducive for mutually collective beneficial actions because they “rationalize cooperative behavior and make it respectable” (p. 218).

Structural social capital and cognitive social capital are intrinsically connected because both are the result of cognitive processes. These two forms of social capital influence a person’s behavior through expectations. Roles are created by expectations and, in turn, roles create expectations for those who occupy those roles and with whom they interact. Similarly, norms, values, attitudes, and belief create “expectations about how people *should* act, by implication create how people *will* act” (p. 219). Therefore, “roles, rules, precedents and procedures within various social structures, as well as norms and values along with their associated attitudes and beliefs, are the *mechanisms* by which social capital is built up and accumulated, stored, modified, expressed, and perpetuated (p. 219).

The accumulation of structural and cognitive social capital, like other forms of capital, requires investment which can be different in forms and degree. Introducing, enforcing, and reinforcing rules and procedures require an initial investment to make people aware of them. Moreover, maintaining inter-relationships in a social network may require short-term losses in exchange for long-term benefits. In the case of cognitive social capital, Uphoff argues, confidence needs to be built between members in order to show that norms, values, attitudes and belief are “alive and well” (p. 229). It may involve making short-term personal sacrifices to affirm these values to other people and to build and maintain trust in the long term. Therefore, for social capital to be beneficial and sustainable, members of a group must take actions that are not purely based on their self-interest but also involve thinking for the well-being of others. This is what Uphoff calls “mixed-motive” cooperation that works in a “positive-sum manner” (p. 230). He also notes that people do not take actions based solely on either self-interest or altruism but rather on both.

Uphoff’s view of social capital is in line with the sociological thinking which diverges from Lin’s view. Lin argues that people act out of self-interest, after carefully considering the costs and benefits of their action in order to gain and maintain resources. People take action for collective interest only when their interest is attached to the collective interest. Even in the case of imbalance exchanges, people are willing to make short-term sacrifices only if they see long-term payoffs such as gaining a reputation which would enhance their social standing. Uphoff, on the other hand, sees altruism and generosity as necessary and critical in maintaining and

building social capital in a collectivity. There might be imbalances in exchanges but people accept it because they consider others' well-being in addition to their own. Personal sacrifices are traded in exchange for self-gratification. The two ideas may seem different yet boil down to one important point, as Uphoff concludes: what people value—which is heavily determined by the historical, social, and cultural context. If the development of a whole group is what people value then it goes well with Lin's argument that people take action based on their self-interest. In this case, self-interest is also attached to the group's interest.

One example from Buddhist practice—which is relevant to the context of this study—may offer an explanation to reconcile the divide between personal and collective interest. In Buddhism, charity and morality are two types of practices that “guide the actions of humanity towards a self-less and ethical purpose” (Houtman, 1990, p. 13). Giving is a means to obtain merit which leads to salvation and better rebirth or the so-called “merit path to salvation” (Houtman, 1990). Regarding this practice, Spiro (1982) concludes “Giving, of course, is an important virtue, but apparently it is also...the best policy to follow in serving one's self-interest” (p. 104).

When I was in Myanmar, it was easy to find—on the streets of Yangon or dirt roads in the village—a long line of monks (or nuns) of all ages who were taking alms (food or money) from local people. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Buddhism is the primordial value that has influenced Burmese society. Even though it would be hasty to assume a causal relationship between the Buddhist tradition and people's belief and behavior (Spiro, 1982), it is important to keep this background in mind. This is partly because during data analysis, even though none of the villagers explicitly mentioned Buddhist-related issues, their responses were understood more clearly when placed in the historical context of Buddhism in Myanmar.

3.4 Understanding CLCs through the Social Capital Lens

The study aims to understand how the CLCs are organised and what helps them sustain the CLC-like functions. Lin's framework offers useful explanations about the formation of social structures as well as motives for actions of actors in a social structure. This is particularly pertinent to understanding how the CLC 'network' is operated by which actors and for which purposes.

Uphoff's discussion of the two forms of social capital shows how connections formed through partaking in social activities can facilitate and rationalize behaviors towards mutually collective beneficial action. On the one hand, cognitive social capital—which concerns *what* should be done in the community—is influenced by, and at the same time is enforcing, local culture and belief. On the other hand, structural social capital—which concerns the process of *how* things should be done—is the result of the defined roles of actors involved in a social structure. This relates to and complements Lin's framework when understanding the purposes of CLCs and how they can be achieved. It is complementary in the sense that the context-related factors are more clearly acknowledged in Uphoff's discussion. Because the two forms of social capital are interrelated, together they provide a nuanced view of the CLC contributions in the communities.

The specific roles of actors involved in operating the CLC activities and how those activities, in turn, contribute to personal and community development are discussed in Chapter 5, 6 and 7. Before that, the next chapter presents the research design and methodology of the study.

4 Research Design and Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach with an attempt to “make sense and interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). It holds a view according to the constructivist paradigm with a relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011).

The relativist ontology claims that there are no absolute but multiple realities which vary according to people’s perspectives. Social phenomena are constantly evolving as a result of social interactions. People construct and interpret meanings of the social world through their historical, cultural and personal lens. Therefore, the researcher’s task is to “participate in the research process with our subjects to ensure we are producing knowledge that is reflective of their reality” (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011, p. 103). In this study, in addition to the fieldwork which aimed to gain direct experience of the social phenomena, historical and cultural context—which was believed to have a strong influence on the interviewees—was also acknowledged in Chapter 2.

The subjectivist epistemology assumes that the researcher and the researched are co-constructors of knowledge through the interaction processes between them. Moreover, not only the researched but also the researcher is shaped by his or her own lived experiences. Therefore, the researcher’s own personal, cultural or historical background should also be acknowledged when he or she interprets the findings (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). In this study, field notes were taken during fieldwork in order to record not only the interviewees’ emotions and reactions but also the researcher’s. This helped the researcher reflect on her own experience during and after the fieldwork as well as during data analysis.

4.1 Case Study Design

Even though all research approaches follow the same basic processes, the way the researcher looks at the problem differs depending on the approach that he or she chooses (Creswell, 2013). This study employs a case study design (Yin, 2009) that aims to study in-depth a phenomenon in a real-life context, particularly when the contextual understanding is highly relevant to understanding the phenomenon (p. 18). This method allows the researcher “to retain the holistic

and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (p. 4). For this purpose, multiple forms of data collection with special attention to the context were used.

In this study, “case” is understood as the “CLC project” in Padaung township, supported by MLRC and the Shanti Volunteer Association. The two NGOs will be briefly presented in section 4.4 in this chapter and their involvement in the CLC project will be discussed in Chapter 5. The project covers three CLCs located in nearby villages.

In terms of organizational structure, the centres are under the supervision of one TSM and follow generally the same decision-making process through a CLC Committee and Sub-committees. The CLC operation will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Except for the size of the population—one village has a significantly higher population than the other two—the socio-economic and other background characteristics are similar in the three villages. Despite some differences in terms of participants at the three centres (number, age, and gender) the findings are synthesized and presented for the “CLC project” as a whole rather than as a comparative analysis of the three centres. This is because the findings are virtually coherent across the villages.

4.2 Research Site

In a case study design, the research site should be chosen in light of the research questions and to provide sufficient data for the study (Yin, 2009). For this reason, purposeful sampling was used to select “information-rich cases” (Patton, 2002, p. 46) that allowed in-depth study of the phenomenon. The three CLCs are located in three nearby villages in Padaung township, Pyay district, Bago region, which is about 300 km northwest of Yangon (Figure 4.1). They were chosen because they are among few remaining CLCs in Myanmar that carry out CLC-like functions, meaning that they implement community development activities in addition to library services and were said to be well functioning according to MLRC. For ethical reasons, they will be referred to as CLC No. 1, CLC No. 2, and CLC No. 3 rather than by their actual names.

The distance between the centres is less than ten km. According to the Myanmar 2014 Housing Census, Padaung has a population of 144,214 and a majority of them, 87.7%, live in the rural area. The literacy rates for males and females are quite high, 97.3% and 93.5% respectively

(MIMU, 2015). Most of the villagers in the study are Buddhist and there is at least one monastery in each village. The predominant occupation is agriculture, particularly rice farming.

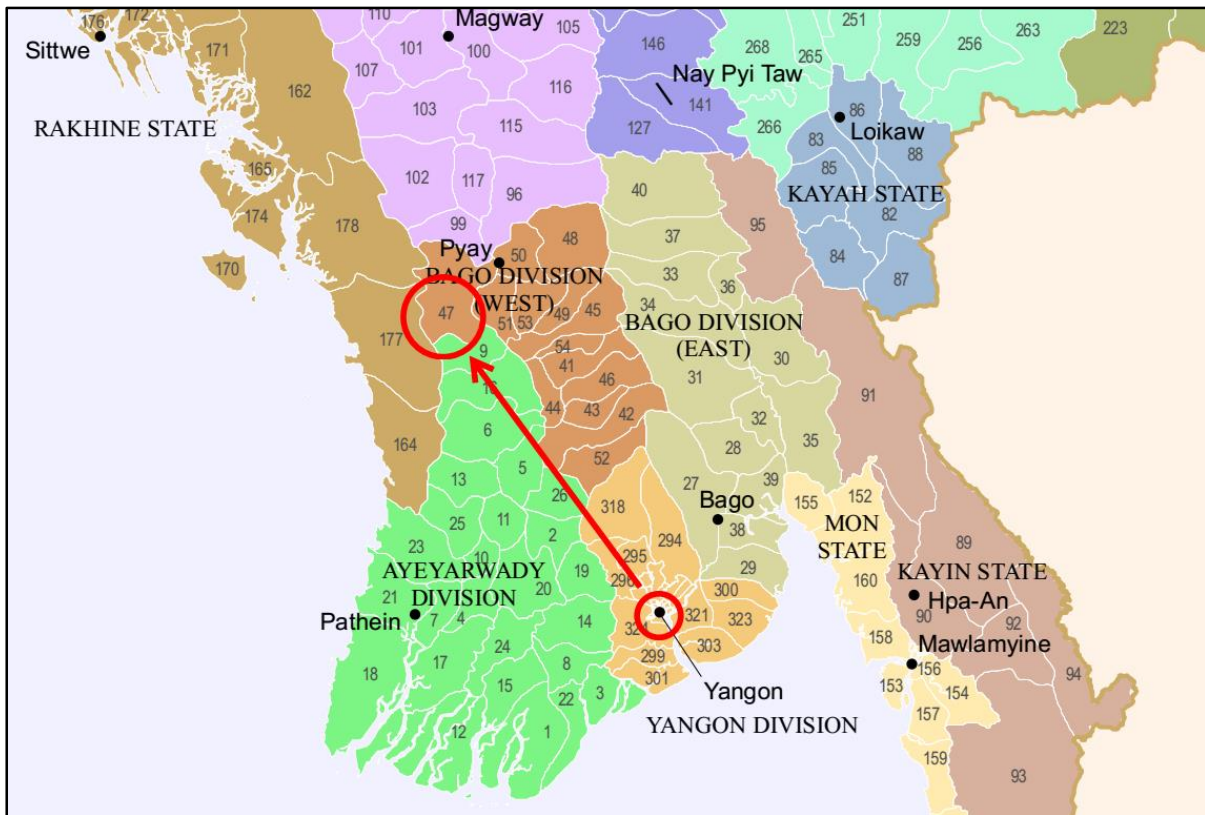


Figure 4.1 Padaung Research Site

Source: Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU) (2007)

4.3 Fieldwork

Establishing research contact in Myanmar proved to be a challenge. The first attempt was made in May 2016, five months before the planned fieldwork, through a senior researcher who had been doing research in Myanmar. The goal was to find an internship in Myanmar so that I could familiarize myself with the Myanmar context and at the same time establish research contacts. This plan changed because of my internship at the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in Hamburg (Germany) when my internship supervisor introduced me to two persons: a former intern at UIL who did her research in Myanmar, and a government official, working (now retired) for the Department of Alternative Education (DAE)—the newly established department for NFE in Myanmar. The government official introduced me to MLRC, an NGO working particularly on NFE. MLRC staff, in turn, introduced me to the Padaung CLCs.

As discussed earlier, in qualitative research understanding the real-life context is inseparable from understanding the social phenomenon. In this study, fieldwork not only allowed me to acquire information and get access to documents that were not available online, but also to somewhat immerse myself in the context as well as have direct interactions with the local people. However, my time in the community was very limited and did not permit me to conduct the range of interviews with local villagers that I would have liked, or to observe more informally the participants who come to the centres and how the activities are organized.

After my first visit to the villages which was set up at rather short notice by MLRC, MLRC and the TSM hesitated to arrange another visit despite my repeated requests. This probably happened for two reasons. First, Myanmar people seem to be very careful about interacting with foreigners. I am not aware of any formal regulations but it seemed that there were some unwritten rules that limited my interactions with local people. Second, during my fieldwork, the conflict between the Muslim population in Rakhine state²⁵ and the government escalated. Padaung and Rakhine state share a mountain range as the border. I was told that there was a security concern, which probably reduced the willingness of local people, specifically the TSM, to accommodate me. In the end, my insistence paid off as the TSM, through MLRC, agreed to arrange another visit.

I commenced my fieldwork at the end of October 2016 and concluded it in December 2016. In total, I spent approximately six weeks distributed over two visits: the first visit lasted for four weeks and the second one for nearly two weeks. In between the two visits, I spent ten days outside of Myanmar in order to renew my visa.

My first four weeks was spent mostly on building rapport with local organizations, especially with MLRC, acquiring information about the CLCs and exploring Myanmar. I also spent one full day visiting the CLCs and the village surroundings to conduct focus group discussions with CLC Committee members, facilitators, and the TSM. I spent the rest of my time on reviewing the responses from the discussions as well as to arrange interviews with SVA, MLRC, and the DAE education official. I also managed to have a short meeting with the UNESCO Yangon Office towards the end of my stay.

²⁵ The international community uses the term “Rohingya”. The Myanmar government, however, denies their existence as well as the term.

When I returned after renewing my visa, more individual interviews with CLC participants were conducted. For this purpose, I spent three days in Padaung. The field visit was arranged by MLRC and the TSM in the most efficient way, that is, we travelled at night to make full use of the day time. I left the village a few hours after I finished the last interview.

4.4 NGO Involvement in the CLC project

There are two NGOs that provide financial and technical support to the local management of the CLCs. The financial support comes from a Japanese NGO, the Shanti Volunteer Association (SVA), through their field offices in Myanmar; the technical support comes from a local NGO based in Yangon, the Myanmar Literacy Resource Centre (MLRC).

4.4.1 Shanti Volunteer Association

SVA is a Japanese NGO that primarily provides educational support and conduct emergency relief activities. SVA opened two offices in Myanmar in 2014, one in Yangon and the other one in Pyay which is 280 km northwest of Yangon, near Padaung. In education, their work focuses on library activities and school construction. SVA has been building monastic schools, organizing life skills projects for children who are out-of-school and night classes for drop-out children. Their work in the Improving Public Library project includes providing books to libraries and technical support for librarians (SVA, 2016).

SVA is currently cooperating with the Ministry of Information (MOI) in a project to renovate village/district/township libraries nationwide in order to promote reading habits, especially for children. SVA provides technical support for the targeted libraries and then hands over to MOI that will then continue at its own costs. In cooperation with MLRC, SVA has three ongoing projects: CLCs, Community-based Extended and Continuous Education and Learning for Out-of-school Children (EXCEL), and NFPE.

4.4.2 Myanmar Literacy Resource Centre

MLRC is one of 18 Centres in the Literacy Resource Centre Network, a program started in 1994 by the Asia-Pacific Cultural Center for UNESCO (ACCU) to promote literacy and NFE activities. It was established at the Department of Myanmar Education Research Bureau

(DMERB)—the government’s focal institution for NFE²⁶—with a contribution from the Japanese Grant Assistance for Grassroots Projects. In 2005, when the government and its administrative units moved to the new capital in Nay Pyi Taw, MLRC separated from DMERB and became a stand-alone NGO located in Yangon.

MLRC still maintains its originally designated functions, which are to promote literacy activities and continuing education in Myanmar through developing NFE materials, building the capacity of NFE personnel (e.g., through workshops, seminars), and facilitating network activities. According to some key informants, MLRC is still working closely with the education departments. When it comes to on-the-ground activities related to CLCs, DAE has relied heavily on MLRC for practical information.

From my own observations, most of the materials at MLRC are locally adjusted from ACCU materials. Out of 32 initial materials for CLC activities, only more than a dozen are still relevant to the new context. Other NGOs or international organizations can contact MLRC and get the materials for their own projects. MLRC staff is also available to conduct training workshops upon request. Currently, besides CLCs, MLRC is also implementing the NFPE and EXCEL project in cooperation with UNESCO Bangkok, UNICEF, and SVA.

4.5 Data Collection and Analysis

The study employed several data collection methods, in particular document analysis, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews supplemented with observations and informal discussions.

4.5.1 Data Collection

Document Analysis

Documents are one of the main sources of evidence for a case study and must be used critically because of potentially inaccurate information (Yin, 2009). Before my fieldwork, extensive document analysis was done for two primary purposes: 1) to understand the development,

²⁶After a restructuring of the education departments, part of DMERB was merged with the Department of Human Resources and Educational Planning to become the Department of Educational Research; the other part was merged with the Department of Basic Education to become DAE (Personal communication, July 2016).

implementation, and contributions of CLCs in the Asia-Pacific region; and 2) to gain understanding about education and the implementation of the CLC programme in Myanmar. For the first purpose, several CLC reports by the UNESCO Bangkok regional office and UIL were used. In addition, several journal articles on CLCs were consulted (Zhang, 2011; Chang & Yoo, 2012; Vollmann, 2014; Ahmed, 2014; Sharma, 2015). For the second purpose, the primary source was the Myanmar Education for All report (MOE, 2014), the CESR (MOE, 2013), several CLC reports from Myanmar to the regional CLC Conferences in Bangkok, the study by Middelborg on CLCs in Myanmar (Middelborg, 2002), and a recent field survey by the MEC (MEC, 2013).

During the fieldwork, CLC project reports compiled by MLRC were also used to gain more understanding of the CLC situation. After the fieldwork, an additional literature review was done in order to understand the history of Myanmar and the influence of Buddhism in the country. An analysis of policy documents was also added in order to strengthen the understanding of the education reform process in Myanmar.

Sampling of Participants

Purposeful and convenient sampling was used to recruit the participants for the focus group discussions and individual interviewees (Creswell, 2013). Prior to my visit I had explained to MLRC the purpose of my research as well as the type of participants whom I would like to interview, amongst others young people and adults who are participating or have participated in CLC activities. The participants were invited by the TSM and the facilitators. They were core members or people who were available at the day of my visit. This method of sampling helped focus on information relevant to the study, but may have prevented other perspectives. The interviewees during the second visit were different from the participants in the focus group discussions during the first visit in order to include more voices.

The discussions and interviews were conducted in Burmese. A translator, who was a senior staff member of MLRC, accompanied me to the villages and translated my questions into Burmese and the responses into English. This raised some concerns related to quality of the data as will be discussed later.

Focus Group Discussions

A focus group discussion is a method that involves interviewing on a specific topic a small group of people (between six and eight), who share particular characteristics. The interactions and collective conversations among group participants are expected to enrich the discussion on the topic (Silverman, 2014).

At each centre, one focus group discussion was conducted which included one facilitator, members of the CLC Committee, villagers who have used the library or participated in CLC activities. There was a separate interview guide for the facilitators (see Annex 1). The interview guide for the focus group discussion was based on the interview guide for CLC participants (see Annex 2). There were in all 33 participants distributed across the centres (Table 4.1). At Centre No. 1, there were comparatively fewer participants in total and, importantly, no one who participated in the CLC activities. The CLC participants were adults or older people. At CLC No. 2, most participants were young people and college students. At CLC No. 3, most participants were female voluntary pre-school and primary school teachers.

Table 4.1 Number of Participants in Focus Group Discussions by Centre and Function

CLC	Facilitators		Committee Members		CLC Participants		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
No. 1	-	1	4	-	-	-	5
No. 2	-	1	2	1	10	3	17
No. 3	-	1	3	3	2	2	11
Grand Total							33

Semi-structured Interviews

The use of semi-structured interviews aims at building rapport with the interviewees, probing some issues, if necessary, while maintaining the interview goal (Silverman, 2014). For CLC participants, an interview guide was used to lead the discussion; it consisted of open-ended questions revolving around the interviewee's view on the CLCs' contributions to their lives and their community (see Annex 3). I also probed into specific issues that were pertinent to the topic. The number of interviewees at each centre is presented in Table 4.2. There were five interviewees at Centre No. 1 and No. 3 each, while there was only one interviewee at Centre No. 2. The limited time did not allow me to reach out for more interviewees.

Interviews were also conducted with representatives at MLRC (two interviews), SVA, an education official of DAE, and the TSM (one interview each) in order to understand their

perspectives on CLCs in Myanmar, particularly in Padaung (see Annex 4-7 for the interview guides).

Table 4.2 Number of Interviewees by Gender, Age and Centre

CLC	Interviewee	Gender		Age
		Male	Female	
No. 1	1	1	-	76
No. 1	2	1	-	55
No. 1	3	1	-	66
No. 1	4	-	1	32
No. 1	5	-	1	25
No. 2	6	1	-	60
No. 3	7	1	-	63
No. 3	8	-	1	33
No. 3	9	-	1	37
No. 3	10	-	1	39
No. 3	11	-	1	36
Total		5	6	
Grand Total		11		

In qualitative research, the researcher may assume a neutral position in relation to the researched in order to gain objective knowledge. The researcher may also act as a “co- constructor of knowledge” through his or her interaction with the researched (Roulston, 2010, p. 224). It is the second approach that applies to this study because building rapport and trust is an important component in semi-structured interview (Silverman, 2004). Moreover, the interviews were done separately but not privately which meant that the way the interviewees and I interacted and the responses were somewhat influenced by who else was present during the interview. I prompted younger participants more often than the older ones because the former were more reserved in terms of responding, perhaps out of respect for the latter.

Other Methods

Information was also gathered through my direct impressions, informal conversations, and informal meetings.

I took notes in a field notebook during and after interviews or discussions with key informants and villagers. This was deliberately done to capture the attitudes of the interviewees at the time

as well as my own feelings about the responses or any other emergent ideas, insights, and questions.

Particularly important was the historical information that I gathered through the opportunities that arose for informal conversations with people who had been directly involved in the setting up of the very first CLCs in Myanmar and who had observed the ups and downs in their development. As noted by Patton (2002) history is an important source to make sense of the present.

I also managed to have a short informal conversation with education officers at the UNESCO Yangon office. This enabled me to understand UNESCO's work in the NFE sector, particularly CLCs, in Myanmar and to discuss issues regarding the CLC operation in the country, such as the disparity between the number of CLCs on paper and those functional in reality.

4.5.2 Data Transcription, Management, and Analysis

Data Transcription

All interviews were recorded using a recorder; recording files were then transferred to and stored in a personal laptop. Some of the recorded data was transcribed and examined while in the field in order to have a grasp of the phenomenon (Silverman, 2014). This helped facilitate my conversations with other stakeholders. It also led to modifications of the interview guides for the second visit (see Annex 2 and Annex 3 for the original and modified interview guide). Some of the questions were not applicable to the situation (e.g. regarding learners' opinion about literacy classes and training courses which were in reality not available at the centres). One month after the fieldwork, all the remaining recording files were transcribed altogether.

Data Management and Analysis

The transcription was organized in Excel spreadsheets. A code was assigned separately for each focus group discussion and interview which was later used for quotations in the findings. Each interview at the respective centres was given a code number at the end (Table 4.3). The interviews with NGO officers, the DAE senior education officer, and the TSM were also given codes (Table 4.4).

The data management and analysis process followed the thematic framework strategy suggested by Ritchie, Spencer and O’Connor (2003). Accordingly, the first step was to get familiarized with the data and to identify the key topics that were mentioned by the interviewees. This was done by reading the transcription and identifying topics through each response from the interviewees. Field notes were also used to assist the process. Topics were extracted from interviewees’ direct words such as “interest in educational activities and community development”, “help organize children’s reading corner”, “try to sustain by their own means”, or “monthly or bi-monthly meeting”.

The next step was to group relevant topics under broader categories. Topics from the responses of focus group discussions and interviews were grouped together; the codes helped to tell them apart. Research questions and relevant concepts from the analytical framework (e.g., structural social capital, cognitive social capital) were also taken into account when developing these categories to ensure conceptual coherence. Relevant categories were grouped under analyst-constructed typologies. For example, “interest in educational activities and community development” and “try to sustain by their own means” were grouped into “community support and interest”. Typologies were later examined altogether to answer the research questions. The frequency of codes or themes had no statistical value, each of them was considered to contribute to the nuanced understanding of the whole data set.

The same process was applied for the interviews with MLRC, SVA, the Education Officer, and the TSM. Their responses primarily helped answer the first two questions regarding CLC operation and provided a more nuanced understanding of the CLC contributions.

Table 4.3 Interview Codes by Modality and Centre

Modality	CLC		
	No. 1	No. 2	No. 3
Focus Group Discussion	F-CLCNO1	F-CLCNO2	F-CLCNO3
Interviewee No. 1	I-CLCNO1-1	I-CLCNO2-1	I-CLCNO2-1
Interviewee No. 2	I-CLCNO1-2	-	I-CLCNO2-2
Interviewee No. 3	I-CLCNO1-3	-	I-CLCNO2-3
Interviewee No. 4	I-CLCNO1-4	-	I-CLCNO2-4
Interviewee No. 5	I-CLCNO1-5	-	I-CLCNO2-5

Table 4.4 Interview Codes by Organization and Function

Organization	Function	Code
SVA	Senior Officer	I-SVA
MLRC	Senior Officer 1	I-MLRC-1
MLRC	Senior Officer 2	I-MLRC-2
DAE	Senior Education Officer	I-EO
Local CLC Management	Township Monitor	I-TSM

4.6 Reliability and Validity

Due to the context-specific nature of a case study, there have been controversies about its credibility as well as its contribution to generalized and theoretical knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Nevertheless, knowledge produced from a case study can still contribute to the “development of a nuanced view of reality” before moving to a more advanced level (p. 303). While reliability and validity are positivist-oriented concepts in quantitative research, the criteria in qualitative research are trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness can be judged by four specific criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Bryman, 2012).

Credibility is concerned with the degree of trustworthiness of the findings presented by the researcher (Bryman, 2012). In this study, to reduce bias, besides key informants from the two NGOs involved in the project, I also gained perspectives from an education official from DAE and education officers at the UNESCO Yangon Office. In the field, I constantly reflected on what I had observed to ensure that the research was on track. For example, after my first field visit, the interview guides were modified in order to better reflect the situation; key informants’ remarks about the influence of Buddhism on Burmese were verified by the literature after the fieldwork. The study has received feedback from the DAE education official, particularly on the policy aspects.

Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings can be generalized to other contexts (Bryman, 2012). In this study, the specific conditions in the villages—e.g. strong leadership, high level of community involvement, common religion—make the generalizability of the findings questionable although they do contribute to the general knowledge about CLCs in Myanmar.

Dependability is concerned with the consistency of the research implementation and possibility of replicating the research process (Bryman, 2012). In this study, deliberate attention was paid to document research activities as well as to ensure that the interview process at each centre was consistent. I also kept a journal during my fieldwork to record events and take field notes all of which was summarized in a report submitted to my supervisor at the end of the fieldwork.

Confirmability is concerned with the personal values of the researcher and whether they have influenced the interpretation of findings (Bryman, 2012). I approached this topic as well as the local people with curiosity rather than a pre-determined conclusion. Personally, I held a belief that education could bring benefits to the recipients, therefore, I was interested in the CLC contributions to the communities. Nevertheless, in this study, I also reflected in the findings the weaknesses of and challenges for the CLCs in order to present a complete picture. Besides, doing fieldwork was more than a one-way communication. In the field, I was often asked by the villagers, mostly the members of the CLC Committee, to share suggestions to improve their CLC activities. In general, my response was to encourage them to keep their commitment and support for CLCs without involving any details of the provisional findings.

Authenticity is concerned with issues related to the wider impact of the study ranging from fair representation of multiple perspectives to awareness-raising to empowerment of the interviewees to take action (Bryman, 2012). Due to the contingencies in the field and time constraint, interviewees were purposefully sampled although not directly by me. An effort was made to include a variety of perspectives by having different villagers in the focus group discussions compared to the interviews, and by selecting them across age and gender. Due to the similarity of circumstances and activities in the villages, and the uneven number of interviewees across the villages, the analysis of the findings has been done for the CLC project as a whole as mentioned earlier.

Besides, I believe that my presence as a student researching CLCs did draw positive attention from the stakeholders and local villagers. The stakeholders were eager to share the challenges they had been facing. These challenges may not be tackled soon, but at least they have been acknowledged. From the community's side, the local villagers often expressed their appreciation of the fact that I came to study the CLCs and interview them so that their voices could be heard. Furthermore, during the focus group discussions with programme participants, CLC committee members, and the TSM, they all seemed to learn from each other's perspectives.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in social research are mostly concerned with the participants in the research: how they should be treated and the degree of their involvement. The primary ethical issues include potential harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy, and deception (Bryman, 2012).

Prior to my fieldwork, my application to conduct research had been approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). MLRC confirmed that no research clearance was needed to access the CLCs in Padaung. However, MLRC staff would accompany me for my field visits. The participants were not asked to sign a consent form but were always given an introduction about my background, the purpose of my visit, and of the interview at the beginning of each session. Interviewees were also asked for their permission that the interviews were recorded.

The interviewees' names were not recorded and were kept anonymous. My presence at the community brought no harm to the local people. Due to the rarity of the CLCs in Padaung and the fact that those studied are amongst the remaining well-functioning ones in the country, even if their names were anonymized they can potentially be identified. However, the research topic, in general, did not involve sensitive issues or require sensitive personal information. In addition, the local villagers were happy to discuss their centres in order to make their existence better known. All indirectly identifiable data and the recording files will under all circumstances be deleted once the thesis has been graded.

4.8 Limitations

There are several limitations to the research most of which derived from the difficulty of accessing the field as an independent researcher and the fact that it had to be done in a rather ad hoc manner.

My limited time in the villages and the fact that the research could not be conducted without MLRC as the intermediary can potentially have affected its results. I had to stay at a guest house located 20 km away and had to rent a minivan to commute to the interview sites. This significantly limited my contact with the "field" and with local villagers. Had I had more time in the villages, I would have been able to observe closely the operation of the CLCs, interact

more with the villagers and gain more contextual understanding. This might also have helped recruit more interviewees who could potentially have added other perspectives.

Furthermore, I had to be accompanied by someone from MLRC during the visits to the villages. I was fortunate that a retired government official, now working for MLRC, who is knowledgeable about CLCs, is known by local leaders and who speaks English, was willing to do so. The interviews were conducted in English with his help which was beneficial because of his fluency in English and intimate understanding of the CLCs. On the other hand, the interviewees might have been influenced by his presence and therefore provided responses in favor of MLRC, either intentionally or unintentionally. Since this may have affected the credibility of the findings, I deliberately set up interviews with other stakeholders to gain further perspectives.

The focus group discussion with CLC participants and committee members was included due to the contingencies in my first visit. Two days after I arrived in Myanmar, I was supposed to have my first meeting with MLRC representatives at their office in the morning when an officer informed me that we would depart for Padaung the same evening by night bus. They had arranged a group of participants and CLC committee members whom I could meet the following day. This came as a surprise as I had only prepared myself for the meeting with the MLRC. I then spent the afternoon reviewing the documents they provided me as well as preparing for the focus group discussions. Therefore, I had to use the interview guide, which was originally designed for individual interviews, for the focus group discussion as well. Although the questions were still relevant for the purpose of the discussion, I was not as well-prepared to effectively engage the participants in the discussions as I had wanted to be.

Initially, the interview guides were designed to understand how NFE activities at CLCs can contribute to improving the learners' capabilities and how those capabilities become functional within the constraints of the social context. The inspiration from this derives from Sen's thinking (Sen, 1999). After the fieldwork, the social capital framework was adopted because it was pertinent to the situation on the ground. The initial interview guides were slightly modified during fieldwork (see Annex 2 and Annex 3) as previously mentioned. During the data analysis, I realized that more questions regarding the community as a whole (rather than individually) could have been asked—for example, the differences before and after the setting up of the CLCs in terms of how external resources are acquired, and how local and external resources are

managed and distributed. This could perhaps have provided additional information to understand the communities' social capital.

Nevertheless, the data collected have permitted an analysis of the CLC operation and contributions in response to the overall research aims and to contribute to filling the knowledge gap in the area. The findings will be discussed in the following chapters, starting with an analysis of the CLC operation in chapter 5.

5 CLC Operation and Challenges

This chapter provides a detailed description of the operation of CLCs in Padaung in terms of the organizational structure, activities, and the roles of SVA and MLRC in their operation. This descriptive account sets a foundation for analyzing the findings in the following chapters regarding factors that are particularly important for their operation and contributions. The chapter also highlights the challenges for stakeholders and the CLC management at the local level.

5.1 The Roles of Stakeholders in CLC Operation

The CLC project is one of the three projects jointly implemented by SVA and MLRC: SVA primarily provides financial assistance while MLRC primarily provides technical support to help implement the activities. The communities where these CLCs are located are considered stakeholders and beneficiaries at the same time —according to the principle “For them, By them, With them”. The discussion on stakeholders focuses on SVA and MLRC, while the involvement of communities appears in the section on CLC management.

5.1.1 Shanti Volunteer Association

The SVA representative admitted that SVA is still not familiar with the situation of CLCs in Myanmar and relies on MLRC as regards their technical support for the local communities. The SVA office in Myanmar focuses on library projects, i.e. setting up libraries and supporting the management. Therefore, SVA’s key interest in the Padaung CLCs is the libraries and the reading promotion activities for children. At the beginning of the project, SVA also provided short library training for the facilitators. To monitor the implementation process, SVA receives quarterly reports from MLRC and staff conduct monthly visits to Padaung.

The total allocated budget from SVA for this project is 7,561,500 Myanmar kyats, or approximately 5,585 USD²⁷, which is planned to be disbursed over the course of three years. This covers the facilitator honorarium, CLC maintenance costs, expenses for purchasing new

²⁷ 1 USD is equivalent to 1354 kyats.

books, a loan programme, and administrative costs for MLRC. The details of these expenses can be found in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 SVA Budget Items by CLC Activity, USD

CLC Activity	Budget
Building extension (per CLC)	1,108
Loan programme (per CLC)	739
Facilitator honorarium (per month)	45
Books (per month)	10
MLRC administration (per month)	148

Source: MLRC’s CLC project report (2015) and interviews.

Note: Expenses were converted to USD from Myanmar kyats (1 USD~1354 kyats).

Of all members involved in managing CLC activities at the local level, only the facilitators receive a small amount as payment while others work on a voluntary basis, including the TSM. The honorarium was recently raised to USD 45 after a suggestion from MLRC to SVA. The facilitators have to be present at the CLCs for five hours a day. The pay is much less than the minimum wage of a civil servant (almost two and a half times less). This issue was often brought up during the discussions with MLRC and at the local level. Therefore, even though SVA’s financial support is strongly appreciated by the communities, it is insufficient. Challenges related to the insufficient budget will be discussed later in this chapter.

5.1.2 Myanmar Literacy Resource Centre

MLRC focuses on NFE materials development, capacity building, and networking. Therefore, in this project, MLRC is primarily responsible for providing technical support to local members by setting up and providing guidance on how to run the CLCs. At the beginning, MLRC held two three-day training courses for one TSM, facilitators (one from each CLC), and Committee members (two from each CLC). As a former unit of the DMERB, some of the MLRC senior staff were directly involved in establishing some of the first CLCs in Myanmar. As regards their capability to support CLCs, they seemed confident:

At that time [when the CLC first started], the UNESCO experts and ACCU experts went to Myanmar and we together went to Yangon township to set up three CLCs after the workshop. In the workshop, the ACCU technicians and experts gave their knowledge about CLCs and then we got this knowledge and set up the CLCs in Yangon. [I-MLRC-1]

Luckily with the support of SVA, we set up another three CLCs because we have a lot of experience with the CLCs, setting up. And we are working in this MLRC and our MLRC staff also know how to set up the CLCs, how to help the CLCs for the sustainable [operation]. [I-MLRC-1]

However, MLRC is also aware of the budget constraint that renders the revision of their outdated NFE materials unaffordable. Furthermore, even though MLRC is rich in working experience, their resources need to be “activated” by external financial support, or otherwise remain underused. With SVA’s financial support, MLRC was eager to start the CLC project in Padaung. When they realized that the facilitator honorarium was too low, they stepped in to help:

Monthly, they [SVA] provide our administrative cost 2 lakh²⁸. [We said] if this year you cannot provide a higher honorarium, we will give this 2 lakh to the facilitators and Township Monitor. That is why we give the SVA project free-of-charge. [That is why] we cannot go around the project off and on [...] because the SVA cannot provide more and more [money]. [I-MLRC-1]

Indeed, MLRC has given the Padaung CLCs more than just technical support and extra money through their own monetary sacrifices. MLRC staff has also given mental support to the local villagers with the hope to keep the CLCs running. This appears from their discussion about the prospect that SVA possibly would terminate the CLC project next year and the advice they gave to the community:

And if they [SVA] stop the project in CLC, it will [not have funds], CLC project will sustain on their own foot. We organize them, we ask them, if SVA stops their project, you don't stop CLCs. They also admit that they will sustain these 3 CLCs. [I-MLRC-1]

MLRC is not profit-making, it's an NGO. That's why we cannot provide any finance to the CLCs. Only we can encourage them, we can provide the training. [I-MLRC-1]

5.2 CLC Organization, Management, and Activities

²⁸ 1 lakh=100,000 (kyats), 2 lakh~148 USD.

The CLCs are managed by local people through the setting up of the CLC Committee and Sub-committees. Together with the TSM, the Committee and Sub-committees make decisions to implement activities to address the local needs.

5.2.1 CLC Organization and Management

MLRC specifically selected Padaung for this project because it was identified as “active” in educational activities. In one of the villages, the primary school is recognized as a “Rural Model Primary School” by MOE. Before the project began, the current centre buildings had been used for village libraries, which was the basis for MLRC’s proposal for CLCs.

At the beginning, meetings were held with the library committees to explain the designated functions of CLCs as well as the required personnel for management. Candidates for TSM and facilitator positions—one TSM and three facilitators—were proposed by the village administrators and older villagers, who later were interviewed by MLRC to confirm their interests and competencies. The TSM—the person in the leadership role of these CLCs—is a well-known figure in the area and a retired head-teacher. He received CLC training in Bangkok a few years ago and is currently in charge of an education foundation which has contributed to educational activities in his village.

At each centre, a Committee was formed and made responsible for decisions. This Committee comprises a significant number of local, mostly older, enthusiastic villagers who are called patrons (Table 5.2). The patrons regularly make donations to the CLCs in cash and kind, mostly in the form of books and other reading materials. The patrons’ names are written on a poster hung on the wall to acknowledge their contributions.

Table 5.2 Number of CLC Committee Members by Function and Centre

CLC	Patron		Other		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
No. 1	7	-	11	8	26
No. 2	5	-	5	10	20
No. 3	7	-	15	10	32
Grand Total					78

Source: MLRC’s CLC project report (2015).

Under the supervision of the CLC Committee, smaller units called Sub-committees were formed to perform more specialized tasks (Table 5.3). A person can be a member of the Committee or Sub-committee or both. However, each person can only be a member of one Sub-committee. As can be seen from Table 5.3, the Sub-committees cover different types of activities. In practice, the distinction among them is blurry. For example, the Library Sub-committee manages the library together with the facilitators. The Information Sub-committee identifies useful and important information for the villagers and put it on a notice board in front of each centre. The Quality of Life Improvement Sub-committee focuses on activities that improve the well-being of villagers, such as organizing meetings to show how to use soap and avoid diseases or narcotic drugs. The Education Sub-committee is responsible for organizing educational events or short language training. The Hobby Sub-committee encourages activities to produce local food, fruit products or souvenirs. The Income Generation Sub-committee is in charge of managing small loan projects and enterprise activities. CLC No. 1 has no Library and Hobby Sub-committees; CLC No. 2 has no Education Sub-committee.

Table 5.3 Number of CLC Sub-committee Members by Function and Centre

CLC	Library		Information		Quality of Life Improvement		Education		Hobby		Income Generation		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
No. 1	-	-	4	4	4	2	3	4	-	-	4	3	28
No. 2	1	3	1	3	3	1	-	-	-	4	3	2	21
No. 3	3	1	3	1	2	2	-	5	2	2	4	-	25
Grand total													74

Source: MLRC's CLC project report (2015).

According to the interviews, members of the Sub-committees at each centre meet monthly or bi-monthly to discuss their activities. The schedule depends largely on their availability. The TSM also meets with all Committees and Sub-committees of the three CLCs once or twice per year to take stock of their experience and discuss further activities.

5.2.2 CLC Activities

The Padaung CLCs implement a relatively wide range of activities. Some of those described below were mentioned during the discussions, while others appear in MLRC's reports.

CLCs and Libraries

According to the MOE, there are 3,040 CLCs in Myanmar, including those that only carry out library functions or have actually stopped functioning (MOE, 2014). While CLCs are under the supervision of the MOE, libraries are under the supervision of the MOI. However, the data on village libraries and CLCs seem to be partly overlapping, i.e. some CLCs are counted as libraries and vice versa (Personal Communication, August 2016). According to MLRC, “real” CLCs are different from stand-alone libraries:

They [SVA] are very appreciating of these CLCs because they know the libraries and the CLCs are different, because of these three CLCs [in Padaung]. A library has a very narrow [scope of] activities but CLCs have more activities. These CLCs are taking their responsibility, they open daily. Libraries [referring to libraries as stand-alone service], they will not open daily and regularly. This is very different. [I-MLRC-1]

Because of a wider range of activities, more accessible services, and a working structure that is specialized on tasks, the CLCs seem to have wider coverage, as SVA rightly pointed out:

CLC is related to the community, from our experience, we try to focus on the community more than only a specific age, like the EXCEL [programme] only focuses on the young generation. Even though the activity is very useful for the young generation, the CLC's role is stronger than EXCEL's role.[...] If the EXCEL [programme] can be part of the CLC, it is possible because it is one of the educational opportunities for the young generation. CLC can cover all generations. [I-SVA]

In contrast to the limited accessibility of stand-alone libraries, the libraries attached to Padaung CLCs offer regular services: they are open every day from 11 am to 4 pm. Indeed, the libraries are the main component, the backbone, of the Padaung centres. Reading materials include books of various types such as children's comic books, novels, magazines, and journals. Any villager can come and borrow free-of-charge; youths and older villagers usually come during the weekdays, primary school students during the weekend when their schools are closed. The facilitators are responsible for managing the libraries and keeping track of borrowing activities. They sometimes give suggestions to the villagers, especially youth, on the kinds of books to read:

In the previous time, the readers from the community, the youth, they came here and they usually read the novels, and I suggested to them to read the books that provide knowledge and value. At that time, they changed their mind and borrowed those books. [F-CLCNO1]

At each centre, there is also a space for children's reading and playing. This children's corner is where children can come to read books and poems or to join recreation activities with the guidance of the facilitators or other villagers. For example, at CLC No. 1, a reading circle is organized every month; children are taught how to read poems and the Burmese language by a villager who is a writer. At CLC No. 3, in the summer, mothers come with their children: the mothers read books while the children play with their toys.

Even though SVA supports the costs of buying new books—about 10 USD per month—and villagers have donated books to the libraries, it was evident during my visit that most of the books were old and in a poor condition. The villagers whom I interviewed, aware of the lack of reading materials, expressed their expectations:

I would like to have more educational knowledge from the library. It may be relevant to my work, my children, my family. [F-CLCNO2]

Regarding the children, this CLC has some pictures, [Myanmar language] materials that are very relevant to the children. More picture books or story books should be included for children. Another thing is agriculture books should be included also so that farmers can come and learn and it will benefit them. [I-CLCNO3-1]

Some people thought that if the CLC Committees could address this issue both by improving the quantity and quality of books and actively engaging people in reading, they could increase their outreach to the villagers—which is currently very limited. Because the village is rather small, one enthusiastic villager suggested:

The borrowers who come to CLC is not enough, if the CLC facilitator goes to many houses, to bring the books and lend them, they will read more and more, and they will have more knowledge. The CLC facilitator should carry the books to the houses because even if people have no time to visit the CLC they could still read the books. In this case, the CLC can reach a wider audience. If we can lend the books directly to the homes, even if the members of the household do not have time, they can at least read 1-2 pages a week. It will [bring] benefits to the members of the households. [I-CLCNO1-3]

Another significant activity of these CLCs is information sharing. There are two ways of sharing information: passive and active. While the task of the Information Sub-committee seems to involve a “passive” method of sharing information, the Quality of Life Improvement Sub-committee engages in a more “active” one.

“Passive” Information Sharing using a Notice Board

In “passive” sharing information, the Information Sub-committee, in consultation with the facilitator and the TSM, decides which information is important and should be posted on the notice board in front of the centre. Villagers who pass by can read it if they like:

On the information board in front of the CLC, they post information sheets concerning health, education, the social environment or the weather situation. People pass by, they can see, they can read the message, the information. [F-CLCNO1]

This way of sharing information is considered “passive” because the extent to which information can reach the villagers depends on the villagers themselves. A villager will only know the information if he or she happens to pass by the centre and provided that he or she is literate. Even though most of the villagers were reportedly literate, there is a concern about their literacy level and how much they can read. A staff at MLRC pointed out:

Most of the villagers do not have a chance to read and write or anything. They can only read a wedding invitation or the shin-byu [invitation] which is the novice celebration at the age of ten. They have no chance to continue their education. [I-MLRC-2]

“Active” Information Sharing for Quality of Life Improvement, Education, and Hobby

Active Engagement of Villagers

Another way of sharing information is considered “active” because it involves actively delivering information. This can be done by the facilitator using a speaker walking around the village to announce important information. This can also be done through needs-based assessments to identify what knowledge is lacking among the villagers and then providing information sheets in order to fill the knowledge gap.

Every weekend, the TSM, facilitators and Sub-committee members organize children and youth to pick up trash in their village. They also place trash bins at different spots and encourage the villagers to use them by touring the villages to explain the importance of protecting the environment.

Thematic Talks

Alternatively, thematic talks are organized to address specific issues such as health, family communication and agricultural techniques (e.g. using fertilizer, chemical spraying techniques). For topics that require technical expertise, the TSM and the Sub-committee in charge of the topic invite speakers or technicians to give talks:

This year, they emphasize health, they invited the doctor from the township medical office and they provided the knowledge to high school and middle school students to hold health talks. Another year they will do other things. [I-CLCNO1-4]

In addition, they provide the knowledge to the parents of pre-primary education whose economic situation is not good. Some of the members and the Township Monitor together provide knowledge on how to behave, how to communicate with each other as a couple, how to avoid narcotic drugs. The parents of pre-school students get good knowledge and they can stop quarreling, drinking, and having disputes. They [the TSM and CLC Committee members] provide good knowledge for them. [I-CLCNO2-1]

They [the TSM and CLC Committee members] invited some of the farmers to the CLC and they gave a talk on how to prevent [diseases]. This is one of the main activities of the CLC: to provide necessary knowledge for farmers on health. [F-CLCNO3]

Since most of the villagers work as farmers in the rice fields, providing knowledge to the farmers is considered necessary to improve the productivity and to protect their physical health. The interviews also suggested an underlying rationale for focusing on teaching agricultural knowledge: to provide a “safety net” for those who are not able to catch up with or are left out of formal education, as explained by the TSM:

The education provided by formal education does not concern agriculture knowledge. It is mainly for the [academic] knowledge. It must be related to the knowledge of planting in the field. The knowledge from the curriculum of the

education department does not reflect the needs of the farmers. I think that the education should provide some knowledge for the development of the farmers, but agriculture is not emphasized in the curriculum. Academically, they will get better and better, they will get more knowledge. In the rural area, most of the students will be left in the village, drop out. Some of the talented students can be sent to the university, a big number [of the students] will drop out and work as farmers. We need to provide some knowledge about planting, fertilization... But they [the textbooks] do not have [knowledge about agriculture] now. [I-TSM]

This concern about the curriculum and its relevance to rural farmers' lives is consistent with Han Tin's view—the former rector of the Institute of Education in Yangon – that most of the population in Myanmar live in the rural areas where the urban school model does not apply well. Therefore, a more flexible school curriculum is needed so that school term and timetables take into account the cropping season when students have to help their families with farm work (Han Tin, 2008). From an economic perspective, this view is also relevant to the current situation of Myanmar where agricultural labor productivity is low due to inadequate investment in know-how and post-harvest technologies, which leads to low income and high poverty in the rural areas (OECD, 2013).

Income Generation Activities

Skills Training

Depending on the needs of the village as well as the available budget, short training classes, such as soap-making, have been organized:

First of all, they invited community members to attend the soap liquid training and after that they could do it themselves. They invited some technicians who know about soap liquid. [F-CLCNO3]

This type of activity is considered income generation because it teaches the villagers how to make products that can be sold to get an extra income. So far, only one villager has been able to scale up this activity to earn money. When I asked why it is considered income generation while most of the villagers make no money from it, the answer was:

Actually the whole village, they make the soap liquid for themselves and save money. They do not go and buy so they save the cost of buying. [F-CLCNO3]

And even if only one villager was able to make money, the individual's benefits can spread to others:

But [if] more and more is sold everywhere in Myanmar, he needs to ask the villagers to produce this one [liquid soap] in cooperation with them. Now he is looking for the markets. If the market becomes bigger he can ask other villagers to help produce this one [liquid soap]. If the packing system is better, it will attract more customers. [F-CLCNO3]

To these villagers, income generation means either to gain extra money by directly selling the product or indirectly helping someone to do it; or to reduce the costs by not having to buy the product that can be self-produced. However, so far, only one out of the three CLCs has implemented this type of activity once. At the other two centres, the motorbike training workshop was mentioned as an expected activity for the same reason: most people in the area use motorbikes and this training will help them reduce the cost of repairing. At CLC No. 2, they wanted to organize computer training for youth to increase their job prospects. At present, this plan seems to be beyond their capacity because electricity is not available at this centre.

Loan Programme

At each centre, SVA provides a small amount of money for a loan programme. This programme is targeted at poor villagers who need investment in order to improve their livelihood. The Committee selects the villagers who receive the loan. They can use the loan for their own purpose and pay it back to the CLCs at a very low interest rate: three percent per month, compared to the normal interest rate in the village of ten percent per month. The CLCs, in turn, use the extra money for their activities²⁹.

CLC Coordinated Activities

In addition to directly providing its own activities, the Sub-committees in each CLC also help to coordinate village activities or events. For example, CLC No. 2 has organized *monastic classes* at a monastery for local primary school children who attend on a voluntary basis. The community provides the salary for the teachers and refreshments for the children while the CLC provides teaching aids such as books and demonstration toys. The teachers have received

²⁹ I did not manage to meet any of the villagers who took the loan in order to understand how they have used the loan and how they perceive its significance to their lives.

official training and teach according to the government curriculum. In these monastic classes, children mainly learn lessons through stories, poems or songs; the lessons help develop moral conduct, such as how to be well-mannered and how to behave respectfully towards older people.

During my visit, I attended one of these monastic classes. Children were separated into four groups according to their ages; each group had a teacher. They sat on the ground, in a circle, in different parts of the monastery. Almost all children were dressed in their school uniform; they looked relaxed and seemed to have fun.

In times of hardship, the CLCs also play a role in mobilizing *local resources* and coordinating *relief activities*. For example, when one of the villages was flooded due to heavy rain, youth and other members in CLC No.1 collected donations from the local villagers and organized a trip to help the flood victims. The other two CLCs also contributed cash to the relief packages. Similarly, for village events requiring large scale organization, CLC members take part as organizers, coordinators, or contributors. Examples of activities—which were not discussed during the interviews but are mentioned in MLRC’s quarterly reports—are providing vitamins to young children, measuring the blood pressure of the elderly, and organizing student essay contests.

5.3 Challenges for CLCs

The implementation of CLCs has faced several challenges ranging from lack of political support to limited capacities at the local level.

5.3.1 Challenges at the Policy Level

From a policy perspective, as mentioned in Chapter 2, according to the CESR, the lack of an overarching policy to coordinate all education subsectors and of an NFE policy framework pose challenges for stakeholders. From SVA’s perspective, as an NGO, their target is areas in which the government has underinvested; however, not knowing clearly the policy direction keeps SVA on hold regarding their plans for the CLCs:

I’m not clear as well what the CLC in the Myanmar context is. Now under the new education policy, CLC’s position might be clearer than before, but we do not see any implementation yet. How much budget will be provided? for what kinds of activities? We don’t see any start yet, so that’s why. Maybe CLC

activities will be clearer than the previous time and then SVA or other organizations can see what we can do for CLC development. I don't say that SVA will stop our financial support or anything for the CLCs. Not like this. After, maybe, next year, we need to see the situation with the new policies, and implementation, with the government, other organizations... and then SVA can do that - maybe in the future. [I-SVA]

Since a significant proportion of the education budget is allocated to basic education—which is government priority at present—together with a focus on out-of-school children and lack of human resources, CLCs are unlikely to receive much attention soon even though a new framework for NFE is being developed:

...EXCEL project or CLC project, these kinds of projects are very important for Myanmar but we have no one to lead.[...] Myanmar is lacking behind, we lack human resources. New persons are very young and they have little experience. [I-EO]

It is the Out-of-School Children Initiative, supported by the World Bank. Now it is running, reaching quite far. UNICEF, the World Bank, and many development partners are going for that in collaboration with MOE. I think when the Out-of-School Children Initiative project finishes, and they have more information, then CLCs will come up. [I-EO]

Moreover, according to MLRC, political support is important in legitimizing and widening the scope of their work. However, the current situation seems to be challenging as shared by one senior staff:

But in this situation, CLCs are in a bad situation. Except for SVA, no other NGOs or INGOs support CLCs in other townships. [I-MLRC-2]

At this time, CLC is [at] the lowest level, a bad time for all of us. At the best time, we had so many workshops, in Bangkok or in Yangon and visiting the villagers. At that time, the CLCs were very successful. Now the CLC is fatherless and motherless. ... The main thing is the government, if they have the will [if they are willing to] to declare it as nation building. Otherwise, we can't go to the villages because the village administrators will ask for permission of the MOE. [I-MLRC-2]

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, MLRC was confident about their experience and capability. However, there seems to be a gap between what they envision and what they are

able to achieve. Finance is one obvious challenge. Lack of political support is another one. Moreover, their capability to implement the project is also a concern which has influenced implementation at the local level.

5.3.2 Challenges at the Local Level

At the local level, despite the effort to organize several activities for the communities, the initiatives are still limited in scope and scale. From the CLC management side, the implementing capacity of people involved was limited. After all, the TSM, the facilitators, and a few Committee members received training only once at the beginning of the project. Since then, they have had no other opportunities to improve their skills. Moreover, even though MLRC was confident about their capability, sometimes belief does not translate into practice. Due to the budget constraint, MLRC has several unfulfilled goals, especially when it comes to helping the CLCs:

Continuous training or knowledge improvement, we should do. Because since we provided the knowledge training in 2013-2014, from then to 2017-2018, there were so many changes. The world is changing day by day. In Myanmar, the government has changed. So much knowledge is no longer appropriate. The villagers also should have these kinds of information up-to-date. We should provide the facilitators with training after training. We should send them to the workshop of management or planning or something. [...] Money is needed if we give training to them. [I-MLRC-1]

But CLC management in the community seems to be weak, I think. In this case, it needs the guidance from MLRC.[...]. So this area seems to be a little gap, I think. So if MLRC can do that more and more... the implementation and running of the CLCs can go smoothly, I think. [I-SVA]

The insufficiency of budget also affects the ability of local people to improve the existing condition of the CLCs as well as to update materials and materialize their plans:

Regarding the books, if we buy the books or the articles, we have to order them from Yangon or Pyay, they arrive very late. The ones from Yangon are costly. We did not get the newly published books from Pyay or Yangon and the students have to read the old books. They are waiting for the arrival of the new ones. [F-CLCNO3]

Now there is no electricity in this CLC due to the money problem. If there is electricity in this village, the students can use TV, EVD or DVD, they can show the lesson, pictures and the students can come and use it. [I-CLCNO2-1]

From an objective point of view, CLCs' outreach might be limited as a result of the villagers' unawareness of their existence and benefits. It might also be affected by issues arising from the socio-economic background of the villagers. First of all, most of them are farmers or workers who are trying to earn a living, thus perceiving little or no relevance of these CLCs to their lives:

I blame the poverty of people in the community. They don't take an interest in social movement and social progress. They have to earn their living day by day, and are very busy with their livelihood skills. [I-MLRC-2]

Our villagers are farmers and workers. They do not have so much free time to come. The daily income is 2000-3000 kyats³⁰ per day so they are not interested in learning. They only focus on their job to get more income. If they have more income, enough for their daily life, they will come. Now they use most of the time in the field. [F-CLCNO3]

An observation from a villager—which was confirmed at all three CLCs—suggested that CLCs have reached only a specific group of villagers but not the worst off who have no time and motivation to come to the CLCs:

Some of the book readers, who would like to learn, are at the middle level in terms of income. They come and borrow the books. [...] But the richer people and the poorer people do not come here. Because the richer people are thinking only about how to get money daily; the poor people are trying to survive. These types of people, the top ones and the lowest ones don't come and read books. Only the middle ones are keen learners and the children come. [I-CLCNO1-3]

Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 2, most people, who practice Buddhism, believe in earning and accumulating merits by doing good deeds throughout their lives in order to have a better rebirth. The novice initiation ceremony—with the primary aim to honor the young boy who is to become the novice—is one of the most important ways to earn merits for the child's parents

³⁰ Approximately 1.5-2.2 USD.

and the sponsors of that ceremony³¹ (Spiro, 1982; Houtman, 1990). This may explain why villagers do not take an interest in the CLCs, as suggested by a staff at MLRC:

In Myanmar they usually have to grow paddy and beans. After that, they are not thinking of any other ways being better than the present one. No innovation. I watch the TV for farmers, it is very good for the farmers but they do not take any interest. Sometimes it is very relevant to the situation but the condition does not permit. [...] and they only have one ambition, they'd like to make the religious affair, to make their son become novice at ten [years old], then it will be OK. [I-MLRC-2]

5.4 Conclusion

SVA and MLRC seem to have a clear opinion of their contributions in the project even though one may expect a little more from the other—an increased budget from the SVA and more technical guidance from MLRC. Overall, they all wanted to have better implementation of the CLCs. Besides external support, the CLCs are managed mostly by the local people through the Committee and Sub-committees under the supervision of the TSM. The three centres offer relatively similar activities which include a library service, information sharing addressing different topics, cleaning the environment, and income generation. In addition, CLCs have also played a coordinating role at times of hardship or community events in order to mobilize local resources.

Several challenges have occurred in the implementation of CLCs. They include the lack of a clear policy framework and political commitment, lack of interest from villagers potentially due to their socio-economic background and traditional beliefs. The next chapter looks at factors that have helped to tackle the challenges in order to keep the CLCs running.

³¹ Indeed, gaining merit is so important that a boy may go through the ceremony more than once so that the sponsors can acquire merits (Spiro, 1982).

6 Social Connections in and Conducive Factors to CLC Operation

As proposed in Chapter 3, the establishment of the CLCs can be seen as a socially constructed network for accumulating and sharing resources for shared purposes. To illustrate this point, this chapter examines the types of social connections in the operation of the Padaung CLCs. This is followed by a discussion of factors that are conducive to the CLC operation.

6.1 Social Connections in CLC Operation

The connectedness among people is vital to social capital because it facilitates exchanges. It can take place in five different contexts: local connections, local-local connections, local-external connections, external connections, and external-external connections (Pretty, 2002). Connections at the local level—the “bonding” of social capital— contribute to augmenting the agency of community members, while connections between local and external levels—the “bridging” of social capital— increase access to resources that are beyond the community boundaries (Narayan, 1999; Dale & Newman, 2010). Of the five types suggested above, four exist in the operation of the CLCs in Padaung (Figure 6.1). The pyramid-shaped organization at the local level implies a hierarchical decision-making process.

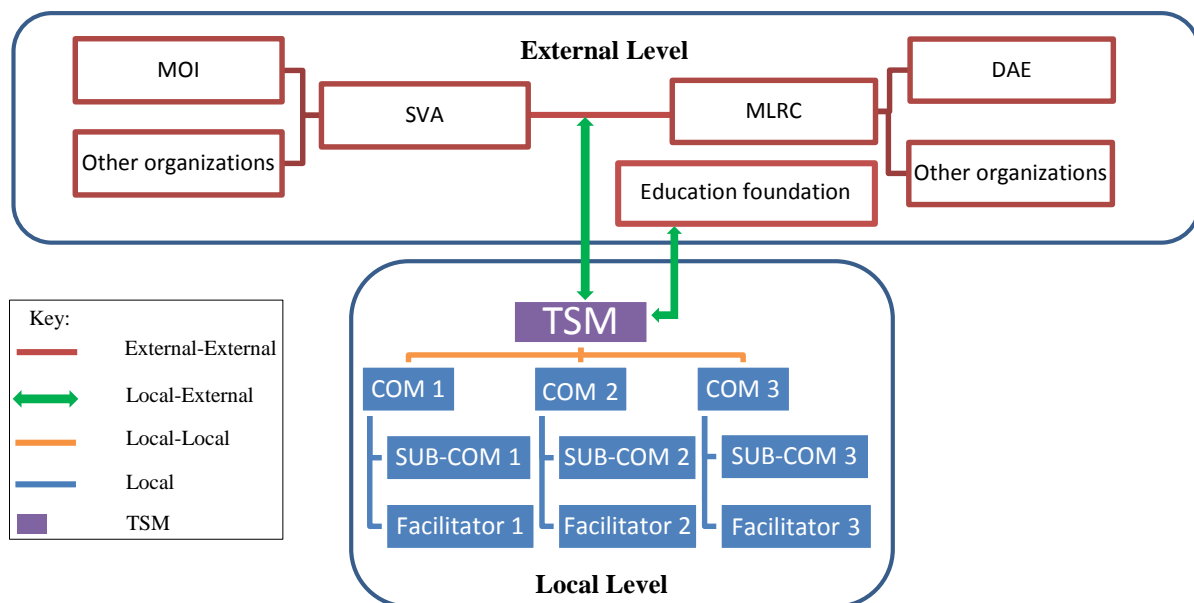


Figure 6.1 Local and External Connections in CLC Operation

6.1.1 Local Connections

Local connections refer to connections that occur between and among individuals within local communities. At the Padaung CLCs, social connections are formed by people participating in the activities together. There are connections among children and youths who come to join activities organized by the CLCs. There are also connections between older villagers and the younger generation when the former group comes to share knowledge and experience with the latter group. At the local management level, there are social connections between members of the Committee and Sub-committees and the facilitator because they usually discuss decisions regarding activities for the villages. This collective undertaking of tasks is considered to improve collaboration, community participation, and ownership, which will be discussed in the next chapter about CLC contributions.

Since the facilitators are involved in almost every activity, they form social connections with the villagers who come to participate in CLC activities, for example, as discussed in Chapter 5, when the facilitator advises villagers on what type of books to read. Indeed, the facilitators are the link between the decision-making body—the Committee and Sub-committees—and the villagers. They help to ensure that decisions are implemented and at the same time give feedback on villagers' expectations to the decision-making body.

6.1.2 Local-Local Connections

There are also horizontal connections between and among groups within communities or between communities. In Padaung, the centres are located in nearby villages. Therefore, CLC Committees from all villages can meet once or twice a year to discuss their activities. The TSM serves as a connecting figure among the three centres: he leads and monitors their progress. It is not clear how many people come or how effective these meetings are. However, there seems to be connections, even if weak, among the centres.

Villagers of the surrounding villages were said to be interested in attending the thematic talks organized by CLCs. During my field trips, there was one teacher from a nearby village who accompanied us most of the time as he wanted to learn about the CLC model and apply it to his own village. Therefore, the local-local connections seem to go beyond the boundaries of the three villages.

6.1.3 Local-External Connections

In addition, there are vertically-oriented connections between local communities and external organizations. There are two clear connections of this type and both start from the TSM. The first one is his connection with an education foundation which enables him to attract external resources to support CLC activities. The other one is his connection with MLRC and SVA.

My visits to the villages were arranged via MLRC, however, primarily in contact with the TSM. Had the TSM monitor not been in favor of my visit (e.g. due to the concern of security), MLRC could not have made it happen. The TSM also accompanied me during most of my field trips. This observation shows the important role of the TSM in connecting the local and external level.

The synergy between external organizations and local communities is critical to the sustainability of CLCs (UNESCO, 2011). In Padaung, there seems to be an existing synergy, especially through the TSM, which enhances the operation of CLC. In theory, MLRC is responsible for the three CLCs. In practice, the nature of the TSM's responsibility requires him to be the intermediary person to work with MLRC and SVA, on the one hand, and the whole management and implementation process at the local level, on the other hand.

6.1.4 External-External Connections

This type refers to horizontal connections among external organizations. In this case, it is the partnership between SVA and MLRC, more specifically the funding-implementing partnership. MLRC needs financial assistance in order to provide its experience in NFE, particularly CLCs, in which SVA does not have so much expertise. There are links from these two organizations that are potentially beneficial to the CLC network at the local level.

SVA is implementing a library renovation project in partnership with MOI. MLRC is working closely with DAE - the government department that is responsible for developing a new policy framework for NFE activities, including CLCs. MLRC is also linked with UNESCO, Unicef, and other international organizations through its established networks. Even though these organizations have little current interest in CLCs at this time, they can be potential partners in the future. The MLRC connections are of great importance because they can attract external donations and channel them to the CLCs at the local level.

6.2 Conducive Factors to CLC Operation

The findings suggest that three factors are conducive to the operation of CLCs in Padaung: the importance of the local leadership; the key role of the facilitators; and community support and interest. The establishment of a local-based organization, as part of the local leadership, also contributes to structural social capital that facilitates community actions through establishing clear roles and procedures for CLC activities.

6.2.1 Local Leadership

The Township Monitor

In theory, there is a local government official at the township level, the Township Education Officer (TEO), whose role is to oversee CLC(s) in their assigned village(s). However, the TEOs usually do not receive adequate instructions to operate the CLCs and hardly find time to monitor CLC activities (MEC, 2013). According to an education official:

They [the CLCs] are run by TEOs and they [TEOs] are from the government. When they are in that place, they are assigned to do that but when they move to other places, the activities can't be implemented because the new person does not know how to do it. TEOs can use funds from the government a little, I think. Some TEOs are friendly with the community, they can persuade them and get local donations, [from] not very popular companies. Some TEOs are very active and operate with local people to organize the CLCs, just 2-3 years, because they have to move to other places for promotion [...] because if they get a promotion, they have to go to the district³². So, that's why CLCs can't last for a long time. [The] key person is important. [I-EO]

This information suggests that the key person at the local level has a critical role in ensuring the success, or at least sustenance, of CLCs. It, however, also implies a paradoxical situation: if the TEO does well at his job, he gets promoted and moves to a different place. This may interrupt the well-established connections between the TEO and the community, which is perhaps the reason why he gets promoted in the first place. Consequently, this may lead to the closure of the CLC if the successor is unable to maintain those connections, as suggested by the education official above.

³² The district is one level higher than the township in the Myanmar administrative system.

In Padaung, the role of the TSM is equivalent to that of the TEO except that he works on a voluntary basis. Moreover, he is a retiree and a native of that area which means that changing work station is not a relevant concern. More importantly, what is significant about him is his dedication to community development, his charisma, and willingness to showcase CLC work. This emerged clearly during the interviews:

But some people are new so we have to give training to them. Some person who knows about CLCs can do this. XYZ [name of the TSM in Padaung], do you know him? We need many persons like him. I only saw him in the video show with his CLCs. He has implemented some Early Childhood Development programmes also. But he came to the Yangon office - DAE has two offices, one in the capital and one in Yangon. He went abroad also [to Bangkok to learn about CLCs]. Some went to Bangkok but they do not have ideas like him. Some said that he gets funds from NGOs a lot so that's why he can run the CLCs sustainably. Other persons cannot get funds like him. If they get funds like that, they can run the CLCs like him. He is lucky and he is interested. That's why he is successful. [I-EO]

One Township Monitor, he went to join the conference of NFE in Nay Pyi Taw [the capital]. He presented the CLC activities in Padaung after we started the project this year. Most of the people, experts were amazed, 'Oh, maybe those are the first CLCs in the country' - it means the functioning CLCs in Padaung. And the participants understood. Even though more than 3000 CLCs, but most of the CLCs are not functioning. That's how they know about the Padaung CLCs. Even though few activities are implemented, but they know those activities. That's why the participants were amazed. That's why showing a good model should be considered very important. [I-SVA]

As mentioned above, the TSM serves as a link between local communities and outside organizations. On the one hand, it is his position that allows him to attract resources from outside organizations; on the other hand, it is his leadership that is needed to lead the activities. This reminds us of a proposition in Lin's social capital theory, i.e. by conferring higher status to individuals with more valued resources, the persistence and unity of the group is reinforced. Moreover, individuals with an already established reputation are expected to reinforce the group's reputation and attract more members. In this case, the TSM with his interest in community development, knowledge, and experience as a respected teacher in the village is entrusted with the leadership role. In exchange, he has a legitimate agency to broaden the scope of his contributions to the community.

Committees and Sub-committees

Another important decision-making body in the operation of the CLCs is the Committees and Sub-committees. However, they are usually missing in CLCs in Myanmar (MEC, 2013). From MLRC's perspective, setting up the Committee and Sub-committees is a priority to ensure community ownership, thus increasing the likelihood that CLCs will sustain:

Because we form the committees, not only the CLC Committee but also Sub-committees. Sub-committees run their own activities, they are very interested after we set up the CLCs in the village. [I-MLRC-1]

As you know, we have 3,077 [CLCs], and almost all function as libraries. They have their own building as libraries. If we can provide training and activities, if we can set up a Committee and Sub-committees, they will run their own CLCs. [...] For example, I visited [ABC] village and they have a very good library building, but they don't know what to do, they don't know the function of the CLC. It functions as [a] library and they open sometimes and sometimes when they are busy, they close the building. The library is not very useful for the community. If we can provide technical [support], form the Committee, lay out the functions, then it can become a CLC. So many CLCs. According to the MOI, more than 55,000 libraries across the country, we have more than 60,000 villages. They can become CLCs if we can set up Committees, provide materials and technical support. [I-MLRC-2]

Task delegation and specified functions are considered major advantages of having the Sub-committees. Since each Sub-committee is responsible for its specialized tasks, there is a clear working structure that facilitates the working process and minimizes confusion:

Every CLC organizes Sub-committee members [who know] what to do for development, what to do for the cleaning of the environment. They collectively discuss to get the idea. [F-CLCNO2]

The manager of the village knowledge subgroup is responsible for this activity. They invite the speaker to go around and hold the health talk, one by one. [F-CLCNO1]

More importantly, this structure requires its members, who are villagers, to work together to actively identify the local needs in order to implement relevant activities. Therefore, it also results in community collaboration, participation, and ownership:

They give this [the questionnaire] to many households [...] then they collect the info and then they compare this and try to identify the needs. [...] According to this questionnaire, nutrition knowledge is not widespread in the village so the facilitator needs to give the nutrition knowledge to every house. According to the percentage, they can prioritize what is needed in the community. In this village, they have 277 households and these surveys were collected from 158 households. That's why it is very relevant... they can change the overall situation. [F-CLCNO2]

CLC members and the Township Monitor are looking for what is the most necessary for the community members. If they find out one or two things, they will try to provide the methodologies. They have the survey to know which one is the most needed, when they find out, they will provide. [For example] growing the black beans, they are using chemical fertilizer by spray. This will affect their eyes and nose. This is very dangerous. Therefore, they will [post a] notice on the blackboard to explain that they should use the spray and use the mask, how to prevent and take precaution. They give them the knowledge. We will find out the need and show the technologies on the notice. [F-CLCNO3]

In addition to their regular activities, in times of unexpected events such as flooding, other village events, thanks to the already established connections and division of tasks, these Committees and Sub-committees managed to mobilize local resources (e.g., cash, human resources) for the village's needs. An example is the coordinating role of CLCs during times of hardship or village events as explained in Chapter 5. The clear roles of members and clear procedures for undertaking collective tasks have supported the process of decision-making, resource mobilization, coordination and communication at the local level. This contributes to accumulating social capital in the villages, specifically structural capital that facilitates mutually collective beneficial action through cooperation.

6.2.2 The Facilitators' Crucial Role

The facilitators are not the ones making decisions but implementing them. In the three CLCs, they are part of almost all activities. Therefore, they are the bridge between the Committees and the villagers. As mentioned above, the facilitators keep the CLCs open regularly, if not every day, which makes the centres accessible to people and makes them stay “alive”. Moreover, they play the role of librarians, guide children to read and play, and engage youth in CLC activities:

If we set up a CLC in the community, we need one permanent facilitator or librarian. He or she is the secretary of the CLC, he or she facilitates the activities of CLCs with the assistance of the CLC Committee or Sub-committee. He or she should participate in this Committee. He or she should... facilitate to help... the Sub-committee to do their activities. He or she should lend the books, buy the books. [I-MLRC-1]

This multi-tasking, thus crucial, role of the facilitators has also been found in CLCs in other countries (Vollmann, 2015; NILE & UIL, 2016). However, providing adequate training for the facilitators is often overlooked (UNESCO, 2016). All of the facilitators in Padaung are female. The one with the longest working experience has been the facilitator for 11 years since the CLC was established as a library. The facilitators have accepted a low honorarium, at a personal loss, in exchange for an opportunity to contribute to village development:

...for the CLC facilitators, we can only provide 40 thousand [kyats, per month]³³. Very very little. But because of the village development, we persuade them to take the job of a facilitator. [I-MLRC-1]

She [the facilitator] gives service to this CLC fully. She gets a little money provided by the SVA. Very very little money, 60,000 [kyats, per month]³⁴, very very little. She has served this library for 11 years [...] She was interested in the service at that time. [F-CLCNO1]

When the facilitators were asked what could be done for them to improve their job, they mentioned skills training and better facilities for the centres as their top priorities, not the honorarium³⁵. They also showed a desire to attend more training or to visit other CLCs in order to improve their facilitating skills:

If I could have the chance to study the technique of the CLC or some other techniques that are useful to the CLC or visit other places. I would like to learn more and visit there, for example, if I have a chance to visit Bangkok because CLCs in Bangkok are very significant. If I have the chance to go there and see what is necessary, what they are doing, what we can do to bring the knowledge

³³ Equivalent to 30 USD.

³⁴ Equivalent to 45 USD since the amount was newly raised.

³⁵ Even though the facilitators mentioned that they have tried to get extra sources of income to improve their personal situation. The most common source for them is sewing clothes at home.

to our CLC. I am very interested in continuing learning for the development of the CLC. [F-CLCNO1]

6.2.3 Community Support and Interest

Community participation and ownership is a reliable indicator for the success of a CLC (UNESCO, 2011). Both MLRC and SVA emphasized the importance of community ownership of the CLC project. Indeed, it has been the guiding principle since they started working with the communities in order to avoid reliance on external support—a common concern for CLC operation and sustainability (UNESCO, 2011; NILE & UIL, 2016). Both organizations affirmed their views:

The most important thing is to make the communities think about themselves, not imposing ideas from outside, because they should know better about themselves than the outsiders. And additional technical support and funding can be considered for those needs. [I-SVA]

Because the CLC is meant to be “For them, By them, With them”. We try to set up these CLCs for them, they should try to sustain the CLCs for their life. We cannot provide them continuously [...] financially or any kind of cash. For this they need to find out how to sustain the CLCs. [I-MLRC-1]

Externally, this approach has shaped the way the communities have perceived this project. Internally, the communities themselves have also been very interested in CLC activities and taken their part seriously. This led SVA to conclude that:

The CLCs in Padaung—it is very much appreciated that the community involvement seems to be quite high. [I-SVA]

For example, in addition to SVA support for the CLC building extension at the beginning of the project, the villagers also contributed a roughly equivalent amount because they wanted to have a “tidy and big one” [F-CLCNO1]. Moreover, local resources have often been mobilized to contribute to CLC activities. One common type of donation mentioned at all centres is reading materials:

Besides SVA, some of the community members donated their journals, books and newspapers, novels, monthly as far as I know, or weekly. There is a list of

donors, 24 people, monthly. Cartoons, novels, newspapers are donated monthly. [F-CLCNO1]

Local support has also been contributed in non-material forms. For example, some villagers, instead of cash and kind, have contributed their personal time, labor, or whatever they are good at for the betterment of the villages:

Because I retired from the army [...] I am now caring for my granddaughter only, I would like to assist CLC activities in gathering books abroad which are relevant to the community, not only in Myanmar but also abroad. This is very important to keep the CLC and try to make more readers come. [I-CLCNO3-1]

In the reading circle, I do story telling for the children, I read the poem, I teach the children how to read stories, how to read poems. That's how the children gain knowledge about story and poem. Because I studied Burmese language, that's why I know many stories and poems. [I-CLCNO1-5]

Furthermore, in Padaung, most Committee members are elderly or respected villagers; the majority of them are patrons who usually make donations. At two out of the three centres, the members I met were teachers or had been teachers before they retired. Their strong interest in CLCs is linked to their occupational background, which was clearly shown through the responses such as the one below:

Because you see, we are old and we are from [the teaching profession], [that is related to] education. I am retired as school head. He is retired as primary school head. Some of them are retirees. We are so interested, we are keen on this education, the CLC activities. [F-CLCNO1]

When the issue of project termination was raised—which means there would be no more funding from SVA—the Committee members at all three centres strongly confirmed their commitment to continue, for they believed that those activities would benefit the villages, especially the ones where they have lived and to which they have grown attached:

We have the intention to continue this CLC. If the assistance from SVA ends, we will make a plan to continue this CLC. [F-CLCNO3]

Whether SVA supports or not, whether some of the NGOs or INGOs support or not, we will continue the CLC activities based on our own strength. Maybe slowly but we will not give up. [F-CLCNO2]

We have worked a lot, we are interested in education. Now we are retired. We are very interested in the education activities to develop knowledge, our education etc. for the next generation, to the younger ones, for better. So we always try our best to develop the CLCs because we have always lived in this village, this town. [F-CLCNO1]

The commitment to continue the CLCs as a means of preserving knowledge and fostering community development was also mentioned as an important contribution to the nurturing of communal attitudes of the younger generation. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the CLC operation by considering them as a formation of connections, both at the local level and between the local and external levels, for the purpose of sharing resources. It also highlighted three factors that are conducive to the operation of the CLCs. Local leadership is an important factor for the operation and continuation of CLCs. The local TSM leader plays a key role in attracting resources and making decisions to utilize them at the local level. The community-based organization of the CLC Committee and Sub-committees is essential to ensure community participation and ownership. The facilitators play key roles to engage the villagers in meaningful activities and to ensure that the implementation goes smoothly.

The establishment and maintenance of this working structure have proved to be useful not only in implementing the CLC's own activities but also in times of hardship or unexpected events when efficient coordination and resource mobilization were needed. Altogether, CLC activities have contributed to the development of the villagers and their communities as will be discussed in the next chapter.

7 CLC Contributions: From Personal to Community Development

According to the report by NILE and UIL on CLCs in six Asian countries, CLCs can bring wider benefits, not only for individuals but also for the communities. CLCs are:

...not just education or training centres, but establishments where information and resources related to the local community are gathered and disseminated and where a future vision for the development of those communities is cultivated. They act as networking channels for local people and related organizations, and promote human development by providing opportunities for educational advancement and skills development at the local level, thereby enabling personal empowerment, social transformation and improved quality of life (NILE & UIL, 2016, p. 3).

In Myanmar, Middelborg's (2002, p. vi) study also reports positive impacts of CLCs:

increased confidence among learners to deal with each other and outsiders, as well as better collaboration and understanding among community members. CLC activities have also contributed to breaking the isolation, not only physical but mainly mental, many communities in Myanmar endure due to lack of educational opportunities.

The findings from the Padaung CLCs are generally consistent with these views.

7.1 Stakeholder Views on the Contributions of CLCs

Stakeholders and the DAE education official, despite their different ways of expressing it, shared a positive view on the contributions of CLCs: CLC activities can reach a wide range of villagers and contribute to the betterment of themselves and their communities:

With CLCs, we can do everything for the development of the community, for example, in education, health, social activities, paddy protection. CLC is the needed vehicle for the development of the rural area. This is very important to establish. [I-MLRC-2]

And also when I see the Padaung CLC activities, even though it is not identified clearly, those activities surely [bring] benefit to the communities. Even though the impacts are not big CLC activities address actual village needs [...] I think

CLCs should be maintained for the development of the community, and other educational opportunities for the students and the young generation. [I-SVA]

The CLC is very important for Myanmar. If we can do this well, people can become literate and they can have a good life [...] It is very important because people must have the knowledge, they have to do many good things for others and for their life also. They can share with others the knowledge of vocational or other livelihood [opportunities]. They can get tutors for livelihood training. Out-of-school children can't stay away, they can do their best for the local community and for the country. They can read books at the CLC, they can look at the internet or learn from the seminar to know how things can be improved, knowledge to construct the country. [I-EO]

Except for SVA's comment, these views were expressed more as a vision for CLCs in Myanmar than as a comment on the actual contributions of the ones in Padaung. At the local level, the TSM has more or less the power to influence the directions of the CLCs. According to him, the main target group of the CLCs is farmers and how to improve their farming knowledge:

But these CLCs are very important for the farmers because farmers in Myanmar live in the rural areas. [It helps] their development in so many ways: planting, field, using fertilizer, education. CLCs can give much knowledge to them. I try to set up the three CLCs in this area and in my mind I want to expand if I can. CLCs can support the development of 70 percent of farmers in Myanmar. That is why CLCs are necessary. [I-TSM]

The villagers offered more concrete examples of the CLC contributions to their lives and their communities. According to them, CLC activities contribute to the development at personal, interpersonal, and community levels.

7.2 Villagers' Perspectives on the Contributions of CLCs

7.2.1 Gaining Knowledge for Personal Development and Sharing Knowledge with Others

The most prominent and steady source of information is the library. The libraries had existed for quite some time before the project started and provided the foundation for opening and expanding CLC activities. Almost all interviewees mentioned reading as their regular activity

at the CLCs. Participants reported that they have used the knowledge from reading to improve their personal situation and well-being:

By reading knowledge books, I got so much knowledge, skills and attitude change. That's why I can overcome everything in my own farming. I can use the knowledge in my work. [F-CLCNO2]

Regarding the knowledge, I read a lot of knowledge books, I understand how to eat and how to become a healthy person, when I go to the university, I understand some knowledge that I already had. That is the benefit. [F-CLCNO2]

Even though interviews were not conducted with children, according to some villagers in the focus group discussions, coming to the library was considered a meaningful way to spend time when children are not in school. By reading books, children were reported to develop better attitudes:

Yes, because if the students are off from school in the weekend, they can come here to read so that they do not waste time. [I-CLCNO3-3]

For the children, after reading the materials from the CLC, they've become more civilized, more polite, more knowledgeable. They behave in a more polite manner and they can control themselves. They can choose the materials according to their interests. They can read the information about civilization, culture, income generation information. They are very interested in listening to the teaching at the CLC, by our teachers. [F-CLCNO1]

Indeed, some villagers believed that reading is also a meaningful way to spend time for adults:

The CLC is very meaningful to the community [...] people can come and read, borrow the books, it is a very useful time, otherwise, they are wasting time. If they can use the time to read books, it is very meaningful to them. [I-CLCNO3-2]

For the people in this community, they should read many kinds of books and journals, they will become well-mannered. I would like to ask other community members to come and read to have good knowledge and experience so that they can change their attitude. [I-CLCNO1-6]

Besides having gained knowledge for themselves, participants also showed a tendency to share knowledge or to urge other people—e.g. family members, friends, or other fellow villagers—to come to the CLCs so that they, too, can access useful information for themselves:

I read a variety of books including those for the children. I have a young boy. That's why I read children's books to tell my son. [I-CLCNO3-2]

Because I got a lot of knowledge from this CLC. My friends and relatives should also find out knowledge in this CLC - like me. That's why I try to persuade my relatives and friends. [I-CLCNO1-5]

The borrowers come to borrow a variety of books. These people can persuade other people [to learn], for example, how to cook or use a sewing machine, how to prepare healthy food. This person should persuade other people. [I-CLCNO3-4]

These connections have helped facilitate information sharing from CLCs to other villagers. CLCs can also become a venue and provide opportunities for the villagers to discuss and share knowledge if they wish. This knowledge might come from other CLC activities or simply their own knowledge which they perceive to be relevant and useful for other people:

Because I get so much knowledge from the books, that's why I have the ideas how to implement the library. I gather the children nearby and I organize story books for the children. Together they draw a picture every week. [F-CLCNO1]

Chemicals affect people's health. That's why I am using bio [fertilizer]. Because of the chemical fertilizer, the soil and products are decreasing slowly. I will show [other villagers] the difference between chemical fertilizer and bio-fertilizer. I studied about the difference for 2 years and now I want to share with other community members. [...] now I am experimenting on my farm of 7-8 acres using bio-fertilizer. [...] I will invite other people to give the knowledge talk to them about the result and the difference. [I-CLONO2-1]

7.2.2 Practicing Interpersonal Skills through Taking Collective Actions

Activities that require social gathering—e.g. discussing important issues, making decisions, and working together to get things done—provide a foundation for strengthening social connections and at the same time opportunities for practicing interpersonal skills:

Not on her own [the facilitator] but collectively we discuss what to do and collectively agree to clean up the environment, and to plant the trees on the way to other villages. This is a very important road. That is why we planted the tree. Collective thinking. [F-CLCNO2]

We [the CLC Committee members, facilitators, and youths] have collective thinking, because so many youths come to the centre. That is why we collectively work together. That's why we together think about how to set up the questionnaire like this. We are thinking that health is necessary for the community. That is why we requested a speaker from Yangon and a health writer to provide a health talk to the village at the primary school. The community members learn how to wash their hands, how to use the soap after the training, how to use the water. [F-CLCNO2]

The collective undertaking of tasks can also be found in children. The benefits were expressed most clearly when the participants discussed children and youth working together in a cleaning activity of the environment:

They [children and youth who joined the cleaning activity] know [how] to sustain the environment. In this way, they gather, cooperate with each other, understand each other, a cooperative mind. They know civilization and they speak very politely, behave very politely and they think together, they help each other. In this way, CLC gives this opportunity to them and they become more polite from [participating in] this CLC. [F-CLCNO1]

Regardless of age, this collaborative action is especially important because it increases the sense of involvement and ownership. Involving children and youth not only gives them first-hand experience to engage in village affairs but also allows them to observe the tangible changes to which they contribute. Furthermore, the intangible impact of this action can go beyond the immediate results—it helps develop cognitive social capital: by working and thinking together, they develop an attitude towards cooperation. In other words, these activities help young children learn to work towards a common goal and to build up an appreciation for *their* village. This can be considered as a part of the socialization process that seeks to strengthen one's identification with a group (Coleman, 1990).

7.2.3 Nurturing Communal Attitudes towards Community Development

The perception that the CLC requires long-term investment was repeatedly emphasized by most of the older villagers. One of them used a metaphor to express this view:

...first the seed of the plant, then it becomes the shoot and the root, if we can provide water and chemicals then it can develop bigger and it can become stronger and stronger. CLC is like a seed, if some of the founders and donors can support, it can become a shoot and a root. In the long run, it is necessary to develop this one. We need to provide necessary conditions for the CLC to develop like fertilizer and water. The CLC can provide activities, knowledge, and attitudes. This CLC can develop for a long time... [F-CLCNO1]

The discussion with older members of the CLCs also revealed their long-term vision for CLC development. CLC activities were understood as both means and ends in themselves. On the one hand, some (elderly) people have engaged in the CLCs because they think that the activities improve the village situation. On the other hand—which is equally important, if not more according to their expressions—in addition to gaining knowledge from the CLCs for their personal development, the younger generation has a better environment in which to develop thanks to the improved conditions in the village. In other words, older villagers perceived this as an opportunity to create a favorable external environment and at the same time enhancing the individual knowledge of youth who are expected to be the future leaders of the villages. For them, the well-being of both the community and the younger generation are interrelated and mutually supporting:

The new generation should carry out CLC activities for their life, for community development. We will hand over to the new generation. [I-CLCNO1-3]

We want to develop the knowledge aspect, the social aspect. We would like to uplift the new generation, who will become the next generation leading this town. If they [the younger generation] have the knowledge and good manners, they will manage this community, and this community will become prosperous. This is our bigger aim. [F-CLCNO1]

The result of efforts to nurture the younger generation manifested themselves in the way children in the village started to take responsibility and engage in matters that are not only of their own but of the village as a whole:

Some of the children come here and they clean up the surroundings and the inside and outside of the library. The children feel responsible for cleaning up the CLCs. The children are very interested in coming here and do whatever they can. [F-CLCNO1]

This perspective was expressed strongly, though not uniquely, at one CLC where a majority of the Committee members were retired teachers. I was told that “it is mainly concerned with the spirit of the teachers, what to do with the next generation and the community” [F-CLCNO1]. Additionally, this notion—preserving knowledge for the younger generation and developing an appreciation of the community—was more often expressed by older villagers. My time at the community was not long enough to confidently assert that this is common thinking among rural villagers or only limited to a specific group. A relevant response from the MLRC senior officer suggested that this kind of thinking may be more general in Burmese Buddhist society:

When you go to the village, township, in the rural areas, our tradition is to give food and fruits, everything to the monks. The families in the village, they offer [the food]. This has influenced the education system, I think. It applies to most Myanmar villagers. That’s what we call the agency that influences the attitude of people [...] Such kind of thing shapes the Myanmar people’s attitude towards communities, the wedding, and funeral ceremony. In Myanmar villages, you will find youth groups, they help with village activities and monasteries, basically concerned with the religious affairs - not only the monks but also the welfare of the villages. For example, the novice ceremony, it is the villagers’ concern, they gather together. In Myanmar, we call “Say Da [Tha] Nar”: willing to do for the good of the people in the community. [I-MLRC-2]

As discussed in Chapter 2, there is a tradition of monastic education in Myanmar—which is also present in the villages in Padaung through monastic classes—which has relied heavily on community support for their sustenance. It seems reasonable to assume that the strong communal attitudes have existed in the villages, and that the CLC activities provided more opportunities to maintain and exercise their collective attitudes towards their villages. It is also a way to strengthen the villagers’ identity with the village, thus the unity of the community in the long term.

7.3 Conclusion

The contributions of CLCs are often not tangible or measurable, especially when operating on a small scale like the ones in Padaung. This is a challenge in the promotion of the CLC concept, especially to the policy makers in Myanmar. The library service seems to bring the most benefits in terms of knowledge improvement. While the views of youths and adults on the benefits of CLCs were often related to the impact on their personal lives or close family and social connections, older villagers perceived CLCs as a long term investment. Of all the contributions, the practicing of interpersonal skills through taking collective actions and nurturing communal attitudes towards community development are particularly important to facilitate the accumulation of both cognitive and structural social capital.

8 Conclusion

The overall aim of the study was to understand the operation of the Padaung CLCs and their contributions to the betterment of the communities. To this end, the study sought to answer three specific research questions:

- 1a. How do Padaung CLCs operate and what are the roles of stakeholders in that process?
- 1b. What factors are conducive to the operation of Padaung CLCs?
2. How do the participants perceive the contributions of the Padaung CLCs for the betterment of themselves and their communities?

The findings were discussed in detail in Chapter 5, 6 and 7. Overall, they presented an analysis of the CLC operation and contributions using social capital theory as the lens.

8.1 Summary and Discussion of the Findings

The CLC establishment is understood, from the social capital perspective, as a socially constructed network for shared purposes, that is, sharing knowledge, mobilizing resources, and organizing activities for community development. It allows the channeling of external resources (e.g., technical or financial resources) to local people so that they have more autonomy in making decisions according to their needs. CLCs serve as legitimate coordinating agencies in order to provide facilities and physical space for social gathering as well as to mobilize the community's resources for community activities.

Furthermore, CLCs have been developed as an abstract concept, a symbol of identification that strengthens the villagers' allegiance to the community. In other words, people are encouraged to come together for the common good of the village through CLC activities. The local villagers also emphasized the importance of these CLCs as a means to preserve, share, and transfer valued resources—e.g. useful knowledge, attitudes towards developing the community—to fellow villagers, especially to the younger generation. Older people recognized that the process of developing CLCs as well as building up knowledge and attitudes requires long-term investments which yield long-term benefits especially for the next generation in the village.

Actors are involved in this network from both inside and outside the communities, who play different roles in facilitating the sharing and distribution of resources. At the external level, SVA provides financial assistance to the CLC project while MLRC provides technical support for implementation. Of the two, MLRC maintains a closer relationship with the local communities, thus has a stronger influence on them. Interestingly, while MLRC showed confidence in its implementing capacities, SVA expressed a concern. Both organizations prioritized community ownership as the guiding principle in the implementation of the project.

At the local level, the TSM, the organization of the CLC Committee and Sub-committees, and the facilitators are important in maintaining and directing the operation of CLCs. The TSM, who is in charge of the three CLCs in this study, is a retired school principal who is well-known for his enthusiastic promotion of education and community development. His reputation as a dedicated and charismatic figure has attracted more people for the CLC activities, especially those who share the same background or interests. For example, several members of the CLC Committee—people who are in charge of steering CLC activities—are retired head teachers or current teachers. This abides by the homophilous principle of interaction, i.e. people with similar resources and interests are more likely to interact. It also shows how the group confers status to people with more reputation and valued resources in order to promote unity and to reinforce the persistence of the group.

In addition, the establishment of a community-based organization through the CLC Committee and Sub-committee inculcates a sense of self-sustainment and ownership at the local level. This organizational structure helps to channel external resources to the local level; coordinate and mobilize local resources for village activities; and make decisions to address villagers' felt needs. It embodies some aspects of structural social capital—especially through roles and procedures—that facilitates actions towards mutually collective beneficial action. The facilitators, who take various responsibilities in the operation of CLCs, also play a crucial role in keeping the CLCs running smoothly. In general, even though not making the decisions, they work on a daily basis and actively find ways to engage the villagers in CLC activities.

CLC activities contribute to development at personal, inter-personal, and community level. These include personal development through knowledge improvement, collaboration through collective tasks, and the nurturing of communal attitudes towards community development. None of these are strictly measurable or quantifiable. The two latter contributions, i.e. collaboration through collective tasks and the nurturing of communal attitudes towards

community development facilitate the accumulation of structural and cognitive social capital. Working collectively to achieve common tasks encourages participation and cooperation for the common good of the community. The nurturing of communal attitudes can strengthen allegiance to and identification with the community. Both can contribute to solidarity within the village in the long-term.

In general, the outreach of CLC activities has been limited. The CLC Committees and Sub-committees have faced challenges in implementing and expanding CLC activities as well as attracting local people. From a subjective perspective, this is influenced by the limited capabilities and budget constraints. From an objective perspective, most of the local villagers, especially those at the lower end of the economic spectrum who are occupied with daily work, do not perceive the relevance of CLC activities to their lives. This indifference may also be the result of the fact that villagers find religious pursuits to be sufficient to fulfill their lives, thus seeking no additional improvement.

What seems to be relevant to the local needs is agricultural knowledge. Improving knowledge of farmers emerges as an inevitable function of the CLCs since in rural Myanmar most villagers rely on agriculture. Community development appears to go hand in hand with the improvement of farming practices and the well-being of farmers. Therefore, in addition to its aim to provide library services for children, the CLC function has elements of an agricultural project that aims to make farmers more self-reliant, more aware, and more capable of what they are doing in a sustainable way (Pretty, 2002).

8.2 Implications of the Findings

Still, there is a bigger question: how relevant and viable is the CLC model to community development in Myanmar? Clearly, this question is relevant to the context of Myanmar because the government still maintains an interest in CLCs. This would be important to investigate in a study of a bigger scope and scale. As emphasized by one senior staff at MLRC, it is important to ensure that development activities are consistent with the government's political philosophy in order to receive political support in practice. According to the FESR, the government has implemented reforms that aim to achieve "people-centered development, civic participation and human resource management....sustainable regional development....and poverty reduction" (GOM, 2013, p. 8). However, the framework also emphasizes a "quick-win" strategy, i.e.

“delivering immediate and tangible benefits to the people of Myanmar in the shortest possible time frame” (p. 9).

As the findings of this thesis have shown, even on a small scale, CLCs can contribute to community development through their activities even though most of their contributions are not immediate and tangible. Moreover, the issues at hand for Myanmar seem to be basic education: improving access, quality, inclusion, and related issues such as curriculum reforms and teacher training. Therefore, from the government side, it seems unlikely that resources will be allocated for CLCs in the near future. CLCs could instead be an area for support by NGOs and development agencies when they target community development.

The second related question is the extent to which the Padaung CLCs can be a future model for community development in Myanmar. Due to the distinctiveness of Padaung (e.g. strong community support, good leadership) replicating this structure does not necessarily ensure similar results. This is because the effectiveness of the structure depends on the qualities of the occupants of the key positions—i.e. the TSM is a respected figure in the village, the Committee is made up mostly of older villagers, retired teachers, and respected farmers—not the positions themselves. Therefore, when these individuals no longer occupy the positions, stability, and thus sustainability, may be of great concern, as also discussed by Coleman (1990). For example, one of the causes leading to the failure of CLCs given by the government expert is that when a TEO, who has been active in engaging the local community in CLC activities, is promoted to a different post in a different location, his successor is often unable to maintain that relationship with the community leading to the closures of CLCs. Therefore, the findings suggest that the establishment of this structure is necessary but not sufficient to guarantee the sustainability of CLCs.

In addition, there is a concern in terms of financial sustainability. Financing CLCs can be implemented through different strategies that involve various degrees of government support: from a very high degree of financial commitment from the government to entirely depending on external organizations (NILE & UIL, 2016). Throughout the interviews, the lack of political support—which led to budget constraint—was the most frequently mentioned as a hindrance to the success of the CLCs in Padaung. It is clear that external support is still needed to maintain the CLC-like functions. The financial support for CLCs is worth considering if the Myanmar government is serious about renovating CLCs: is the government going to support CLCs financially or not? If yes, how much and for how long before they can stand on their own feet?

Therefore, even though MLRC believed that establishing the CLC Committee at the local level was the decisive factor to maintain CLCs, to a larger extent, especially in a country with as much diversity as in Myanmar, the answer requires careful consideration on a case-by-case basis.

Most people whom I interviewed were positive about the benefits of CLCs to themselves and their communities. The findings of this study support their views. Because social capital is embodied in human relationships, it takes time to develop. My time in Myanmar was sufficient to capture its essence. Nevertheless, I do believe more research on a bigger scope and scale is needed to thoroughly understand the significance of CLCs and their contributions to the communities in Myanmar.

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Annex 1. Interview Guide for CLC Facilitators

1. We can perhaps start by getting to know your experience in working for this CLC?
 - Why you started working here?
 - How long?
 - What is your current role?
2. Have you had any opportunities to receive training or support to improve your work at CLC?
3. Could you tell me more about the typical life of people in this community? For example, how children grow up, what type of education they receive (do many of them go to school or other types of education?), what type of economic activities do they have...
4. What benefits do you think this CLC brings to
 - the participants?
 - the community?
5. Do you think this CLC receives support and appreciation from
 - the community? In which ways?
 - the government? In which ways (any supporting policies)?
6. What do you think are the key factors that contribute to the success?
7. What are the challenges you have faced during the time you work here? (you may give examples in terms of funding, support from the community, recruiting students/trainers)
8. What do you think are the difficulties that the participants have during the course after they complete the course?
9. What do you think about the future of this CLC?
10. What do you suggest in order to
 - To make your work easier?
 - To improve the activities of CLC and the quality of the course?
 - To improve the lives of participants?
11. Would you like to add anything in addition to what we have discussed?
12. Do you have any questions for me?

Annex 2. Interview Guide for CLC Participants (submitted to NSD)

1. Did you go to school before? If yes, until which grade? Could you tell me why you have dropped out or not gone to school?
2. Could you tell me why you chose to participate in CLC? If you had had a choice to go school or other forms of education, would you still consider going to CLC?
3. Did you receive support from your family when you participated in the course, and after you finished?
4. Could you tell me more about the course(s) you took at CLC?
 - Which course(s)? When and how long? If you took more than one course, why did you come back?
 - Quality of the course? Did you gain the knowledge you expected to learn? Would you recommend adding other skills/knowledge to improve the course?
5. After the course, have you been able to perform more types of work/skills that you were unable to do before?
6. How do you think about available opportunities for you after you finished the course? (More or less?) (Pursue new jobs, earn more money, participate in community activities)
7. Do you think the current job/lifestyle match your ability? Do you face any difficulties applying the gained skills/knowledge in your life? Please explain.
8. After the course, is there anything you discovered that you had not known before
 - yourself?
 - your family and community?
 - values of education?
 - other issues (gender, environment, rights, etc.)?
9. Do you notice any changes in the way you think about family and community? How about the way your family and community think about you?
10. Do you think learning at CLCs benefits you the same way as someone who studies in formal education? And who does not have any education at all? Please explain your answer.
11. Will you recommend other people to participate in CLCs and why?
12. Are you able to make your own decisions and execute them? Do you see any changes in your ability to make decisions?
13. Overall, do you think you are better off thanks to the new possibilities you have after the course?
14. If you had not participated in CLC, how different do you think your life would be?

15. If you had a choice, would you still want to do what you are doing now?
16. If there was one thing you could suggest to change, whether it be from the government or the society, to make your life easier, what would it be?
17. Would you like to add anything in addition to what we have discussed
18. Do you have any questions for me?

Annex 3. Interview Guide for CLC Participants (modified)

1. Did you go to school before?
 - a. If yes, until which grade?
 - b. If no, please explain why you dropped out of school or had not gone to school.
2. Could you tell me more about the activities that you have participated at this CLC? What are they and how often?
3. After participating in CLC's activities, have you discovered anything that you had not known before
 - a. About yourself
 - b. Your family and community
 - c. Value of education
 - d. Other issues (environment, gender, health,...)
4. How do you apply the knowledge in your life?
5. What do you expect from the CLC in order to make their activities more relevant and meaningful to your life?
6. Do you have any suggestions to improve the quality of CLC's activities?
7. Will you recommend other people to participate at this CLC? Why?
8. Why do you think we should keep this CLC running?
9. If there were one thing you could suggest to change to make your life easier, what would it be?
10. Would you like to add anything to what we have discussed?
11. Do you have any questions for me?

Annex 4. Interview Guide for the Township Monitor

1. We can perhaps start by getting to know your experience in working for this CLC?
 - Why you started working here? For how long? What is your current role?
2. Have you had any opportunities to receive training to improve your work at this CLC?
3. Could you tell me more about how this CLC is operated?
 - How the curriculum is designed?
 - How the participants are informed and registered?
 - How the facilitators/trainers are recruited? Do they receive any training?
4. Could you tell me about the typical life of people in this community? How children grow up, what type of education they receive (do many of them go to school or other types of education?), what type of economic activities do they have...
5. What benefits do you think this CLC brings to
 - the participants?
 - the community?
6. Do you think this CLC receives support and appreciation from
 - the community? In which ways?
 - the government? In which ways (any supporting policies)?
7. What do you think is the key factors that contribute to the success of this CLC?
8. What are the challenges you have faced during the time you work here? (may give examples in terms of budget, support from the community, recruiting students/trainers)
9. What do you think are the difficulties that participants have during the course and after they complete the course?
10. What do you think about the future of this CLC?
11. What do you suggest in order to
 - To make your work easier?
 - To improve the activities of CLC and the quality of the course?
 - To improve the lives of participants?
12. Would you like to add anything in addition to what we have discussed?
13. Do you have any questions for me?

Annex 5. Interview Questions for the Myanmar Literacy Resource Centre

1. Perhaps we could start by getting to know how your NGO has assisted the implementation of CLCs? And your role in this process?
2. Do you think CLCs have received support and appreciation from
 - the community? In which ways?
 - the government? In which ways (any supporting policies)?
3. What are the challenges you have faced regarding your work on CLCs?
 - From an up-ward perspective (challenges from working with the government and other partners?)
 - From a down-ward perspective (challenges from working with the CLCs, people on the ground, community etc.)
4. What do you see as challenges for
 - people working for CLCs (heads, facilitators)?
 - the participants themselves?
5. Does your NGO have any plans to improve the quality of courses and management at CLCs?
6. What do you think about the future of CLCs?
7. What do you suggest in order to
 - To make your work easier?
 - To improve the activities of CLC and the quality of the course?
 - To improve the lives of participants?
8. Would you like to add anything in addition to what we have discussed?
9. Do you have any questions for me?

Annex 6. Interview Questions for the Shanti Volunteer Association

1. What is the role of SVA in the implementation of the CLCs in Padaung?
2. What do you think about the activities and performance of the CLCs in Padaung?
3. What are the challenges SVA has faced regarding your work on CLCs?
 - From an up-ward perspective (challenges from working with the government and other partners?)
 - From a down-ward perspective (challenges from working with the CLCs, people on the ground, community etc.)
4. According to MLRC officers and some members of the people committee, CLCs have a huge potential to contribute to community development. What is your view about the role of CLCs?
5. What do you think makes the Padaung CLCs well-received by the community?
6. Does SVA plan to continue the CLC project with MLRC after this year? And what do you think about the future of these CLCs?

Annex 7. Interview Questions for the DAE Education Official

1. The National Education Strategic Plan (2016-2021) mentions that there are 3,077 CLCs in the country, however, according to MLRC, most of them are libraries and several stopped functioning.
 - Is the department (DAE) aware of the difference between the number on paper and in reality?
 - Does the department have any plan to upgrade libraries to CLCs or re-open the non-functional ones?
2. MLRC has plans to expand CLCs (Padaung model) to other townships as they believe this kind of community-based model is important for the community development. Does the department have any plan to support MLRC in the near future?
3. Overall, what is seen as the role of CLCs in the development of the country? And what is the policy direction of the Ministry of Education regarding CLCs?
4. What is the priority of the education at this moment, according to you?
5. Does the government have any plans/mechanisms to cooperate with other UN agencies, local NGOs or iNGOs in order to develop the work of CLCs?